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# YANKEE CABALLERO









Bells ring constantly in Quito, for it is a city of monasteries, convents and churches. This façade of the Jesuits' church there ranks with the finest examples

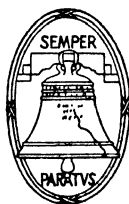
# YANKEE CABALLERO

By

WILLIAM N. MERRYMAN

*Introduction by*  
EARL P. HANSON

*Illustrated*



ROBERT M. McBRIDE & COMPANY

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THIS BOOK IS AFFECTIONATELY DEDICATED TO A GIRL, *GERTRUDE P.*, WHOM I MET MANY YEARS AGO—*MY WIFE*  
W. N. M.

YANKEE CABALLERO  
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## *Introduction*

IN 1780 Jadock Steele of Connecticut bumped into a group of Indians who had just finished attacking and looting Royalton, Vermont. They took him with them, and kept him as an honored prisoner for a number of years, at one time inducting him into their tribe with an elaborate ceremony. Steele finally managed to escape, and to write a fascinating account of his captivity.

I pick this story at random, not because there is anything unusual about it, but precisely because it was so common in the history of our American frontier. There are dozens and hundreds of similar ones, some available in print, some never recorded but still told by word of mouth, and some lost forever because the "victims" of the captivity were either unable or unwilling to escape. Just a few cases in point were the experiences of Mary Rowlandson and Mercy Harbison, the captivity of James Smith among the Delawares, and the captivity of the entire Gilbert family of ten people. From the days when Coronado searched for the Seven Cities of Cibola, through to the time of Custer's massacre, there was probably never a time when isolated white men or women didn't live with the Indians, either as prisoners or as voluntary exiles from their own kind; and never an Indian tribe having fringe-contact with the whites which did not, at one time or another, harbor some such white guest.

While the story is always fascinating, it very often follows an extremely common pattern. Somehow or other, a

white man fell into the hands of the Indians, was terrified at first, was treated with a certain amount of decency and consideration, began to like the life, and was eventually initiated into the tribe. Marriage with the chief's daughter or with some other woman of high social standing was quite the common thing. Also it was usual for those who subsequently wrote up their experiences to look back on the days of their "captivity" with a certain amount of nostalgic longing.

In view of the thoroughness with which that story was established and authenticated again and again in our own history, it is somewhat astonishing to see the baleful mistrust with which it is so often received today when it comes up to us from the wilds of South America. For many parts of that great continent are today where the United States was a hundred or two hundred years ago: the things that happened here then happen there now with almost monotonous regularity. The story of the isolated white man who lives with untamed jungle Indians, either perforce or because he likes it, is as accepted in the South American interior today as it was on the North American frontier a century and a half ago. To be sure, it has been ruined, raped, degraded, and debauched into the silly "White God" distortion, by Hollywood, the press-agents, and by a large number of intrepids who constantly barge into the bush to "rescue" a Fawcett or a Redfern. But that is not the story's fault, or the country's, or the Indians'.

I knew a German once—remarkable the way these Germans infiltrate South America—who lived the peaceful life of a country gentleman in the upper reaches of the Amazon Basin. He had a clean and airy house of palm-thatch; he had an Indian wife and a number of Indian "servants"; he was on excellent terms with a large number of fiercely painted

savages who lived near him in the bush, and he seldom saw white visitors. He treated me well, but he asked me not to publicize details of his identity or location.

"Why?" I asked him.

"Because I'm an explorer, and I'm lost." After the significance of that statement had begun to soak into me, he added with some vehemence, "Listen, I've got a wife in Germany. And if that woman finds out that I'm still alive and where I am, it'll be just like her to send a rescue-expedition in here after me."

So there it is again, just another variation on the old theme, which never loses its freshness except when the publicity-boys start fooling with it. It is the story of Fernandez Peña who lived for twenty-odd years in the shadow of Mount Roraima, only to be discovered a few years ago by his Venezuelan countrymen who had long since given him up for lost. It is a variation of the story of my French friend on the upper Guainia River, and—perhaps—also of those of Fawcett and Redfern.

Now it comes again, this time in a somewhat more conventional form, the last of three adventures described in the present book. Four adventurous men, who should have known better but didn't, go barging up the Rio das Mortes. They are captured by the savage Chavante Indians. They try the white man's hocus pocus and are still wondering if that is the reason they weren't killed. Their leader is inducted into the tribe as a sub-chief, with a ceremonial dance that he describes dramatically and with real insight. He marries the chief's daughter. They find the gold that they'd gone in for, though not too much of it. They escape. Merryman writes a book about it, and I not only believe the book, but like it to boot.



I believe the book partly because I see no reason why I shouldn't, and partly because it is too full of detailed observations, of sympathetic side-remarks, of honest description and characterization, and of decent doubts and detachment, to allow me to question its integrity. It might have been dressed up a little here and there, but that is legitimate and isn't overdone. It uses a Hollywood theme—and even Hollywood got some of its themes from reality—but through it, the story presents a picture of savage Indian life and character that rings true to the things I learned about the South American Indians during those many months in the interior for which Mr. Merryman now rouses such a powerful longing.

I don't know the Chavante Indians, but I have heard about them. Years ago they were River-people, living on the banks of the Xingu. Then the white men came up that river and there was trouble. The Chavantes had a good and wise old chief in those days, as they still seem to have, according to Mr. Merryman's account. He picked up his tribe—men, women, and children, war-clubs, bows, arrows, pots and pans and hammocks—and moved it bodily inland, days and weeks of travel away, to a location where they were safe from the white intruders. And that, too, is no new story in the South American jungles, scene of many a major human migration. Neither is the story of the savage Indian tribes who now maintain their own "reservations," are hostile to white men, but are tremendously intrigued by them when they can get them in harmless lots of only two or three to add social prestige to their villages.

Hence what I like about the present book is not any supposed unusualness, but precisely the opposite quality, running all the way through it. I have never tried to run sheep over the Andes into Chile, but I know the Atacama Desert in all

its stark, brutal, and desolate beauty, and Mr. Merryman has the “feel” of that country so well here that I find myself with itching feet, burning to return to my first haunts in South America. I have never hunted for treasure in Ecuador, and while I haven’t any doubt that it’s there, I do doubt that I ever *will* go to seek it. But I know something about the Amazonian forests, and about the naked “semi-savage” Indians who paddle canoes for the whites and do their work for them on a basis little removed from slavery. Here I find those things real, as I once knew them, which is more than I can say for a good many books of South American adventure.

And Mr. Merryman’s characters—what more can I say about them except that they are living images of a large number of people I have known and often esteemed very highly? The illiterate half-breed, Carlos, loyal to the point of fanaticism, simple and yet highly intelligent, religious and yet shockingly sacrilegious—I have known him by the dozens in the Andes and on the Orinoco River, and he is the salt of the earth. Then the splendid Mendez, scion of an aristocratic family, the windy carcass of a decayed conquistador tradition—you find him in all the cities, dozens of him scattered among the millions of alert and up-to-the-minute people who make up that part of South America’s variegated population that today worries about neutrality, trade-cartels, Nazi-infiltration, Yanqui infiltration, and the Monroe Doctrine. And the strange thing is that when you run into one of these Mendez’s, it never takes him long to get around to exactly the theme that caught Merryman: the quite-possibly-true yarn of some fabulous buried Indian treasure.

So that is Mr. Merryman’s book, and as I write this introduction I find myself really surprised that I like it. For as a

rule I agree wholeheartedly with Clifton Fadiman, who got up at a Book Fair a few years ago and sent shivers of indignation through the ranks of the professionally intrepid by doing a thorough and nasty job of unburdening his soul regarding the usual run of travel-exploration-adventure literature. Mr. Fadiman was all too tragically right. But the trouble with so many modern first-hand adventure stories has been entirely with the point of view of the authors, or of whoever was advising them. Not with the stories themselves.

This book makes no pretence to importance, and there is no reason why it should. It tells of a series of interesting adventures in a setting that has body and honest character. It does not take its author too seriously as a heroic public figure, which may well be the one thing that distinguishes a good adventure-yarn from a shabby, press-agented, Hollywood imitation.

And that is a great deal, a rarity in this kind of modern literature, and enough to make any adventure story deserving of success.

—EARL P. HANSON

# YANKEE CABALLERO



## *Chapter I*

ALMAGRO and his band of crazy devils who called themselves the conquistadores were the first white men to see the country that is northern Chile today. They came down from Peru after their leader had had his falling-out with Pizarro. They were parched in the deserts and frozen in the bitter cold of the higher Andes. They tore the country apart for gold, but all they found was terrible hardship and bitter disappointment.

That has happened to a lot of people in that country, in the four hundred years that have elapsed since the early Spaniards followed the mirage of easy money. It happened to me too, the time I rode out of Chile to seek my fortune in sheep.

We rode toward Argentina to buy the sheep, three of us, well mounted, with a string of pack mules and a white bell mare in front. On the occasional calm days, when the wind was not sandblasting our faces and threatening to lift us out of our saddles, and when the mules weren't trying to use their own better judgments about where to go, everything was serene and the caravan ambled along, hour after hour, in that tireless easy shuffle that only good pack mules can achieve.

Everything was serene—except, that is, when Carlos had one of his attacks. You couldn't trust him to leave well enough alone. He would ride along for ten miles or so, sitting in his saddle, watching for ostriches and commenting on the mirage

that was flooding the trail ahead and cutting off all the distant mountains at their bases—or perhaps he would just be sitting—when suddenly he'd decide that the mules weren't going fast enough to suit him. There never seemed to be any reason for it, but nevertheless he roused himself every once in so often, took a deep breath, and roared forth:

"Mula! Mula! Matcho! Bestia carajo! Ande! Tsha-a-ah!"

The general sense of it was that Carlos would be pleased if the beasts would get a move on—and never have I heard anything so completely satisfying as that inevitable last, final and exultant "Tsha-a-ah." It seemed to satisfy the mules too, for they kept right on shuffling along, without a break in gait or pace, as though nothing on earth could disturb the placidity of their voyage. Which was, of course, an insult to Carlos's dignity, and so, perhaps to make sure that he was really earning his pay, he would rise in his stirrups, swing the long whip end of his finely braided reins, and let some unfortunate pack mule have it smack on the rump. There would be a jump or two, a few feet of lively trotting, and then everything would settle down again to the same easy travel-pace, with Carlos and Juan and myself sitting in our saddles, watching the columns of sand that raced over the distant desert in the grip of occasional whirlwinds and wondering when we'd get the wind full blast in our faces again.

We were going to drive sheep from Argentina back over the Andes and over the line into Chile. I had a contract in my pocket to supply ten thousand of them every year to the Anaconda Copper Company's mine at Portorillos. Four thousand laborers at that camp would have their fill of their beloved mutton, I would grow rich, and everything would be splendid. But it didn't work out that way. It worked out into



Airplanes and railroads cross the Andes from Chile to Argentina, but shepherding and similar undertakings still call for the old mule-trail, with all its hazards.





a string of disappointments and stirring adventures. Eventually it was to develop into prospecting and mining and Indian fighting and a vagabondage over the greater part of South America. There is still adventure to be found in South America if you know where.

All right, I'll start at the beginning. That, I suppose, was in Nevada, where I was a restless and dissatisfied young boy. Then it went on to Annapolis, where life had its glamour but I didn't like the discipline. Then to postwar Europe, with money rolling in from a bull market and rolling out on green baize tables at Nice and Monte Carlo. There was the International Set, and the Emigré Set, and lots of champagne, and the Derby at Epsom Downs, and everything was fine till the crash came and there was nothing left.

I flipped a coin that I'd got from an American soldier in Paris. This was a special coin with heads on both sides. Heads I'd go to South America, and tails I'd find a nice respectable job and settle down. Despite the depression I waved good-bye to Manzanillo, Mexico, from the stern rail of a Pacific Mail steamer; then I fought bedbugs on a smaller ship that dumped me at Chañaral, on the desolate coast of Chile, and there, I suppose, is where the story really begins. There had been an engineer on the steamer with me, and he thought I might get a job with his company at Portorillos.

We took a train at Chañaral, up into the desert, through Pueblo Hundido, a wild little town of camp-followers, inland, climbing upward steadily, until, at some 7500 feet, we reached Portorillos—a fairly new camp, the industrial processing-plants still under construction. Some forty or fifty Americans lived in very comfortable houses, with a splendid club. The "native camp" housed about four thousand workers.

Everywhere was the dry desert, rock, sand, shale, and glaringly white deposits of salt and nitrate. Not a single spear of green was in sight. Drinking water was hauled up in tank-cars from the vicinity of Pueblo Hundido.

Portorillos is only another example of the richness of the world's driest and most desolate desert. The roaring mine at Chuquicamata in the center of that desert, and Portorillos near the southern edge, produce millions on millions of pounds of copper, and between them there are nitrate, and iodine, and silver, and lead, and untold riches as yet unexploited.

Untold? Every Chilean in that part of the world has a mine, or a prospect, or a sample, or—anyway—a wonderful story, and he never misses a chance to tell it.

"The wealth of this country, señor! The richness! The possibilities! Immense, I tell you! Nothing is lacking but the capital, and you Americans have to furnish that. Señor, did I tell you—? Let me show you a sample."

The Atacama Desert covers the northern half of Chile, from the highest Andes on the Argentine and Bolivian borders clear down to the coast, where passengers on Grace Line steamers lean on the rail coasting along for days at a stretch, wondering if they'll ever see anything but those same bare brown hills, with only here and there a river in its narrow little valley of green forcing its tortuous way to the sea. That is the great desert that Darwin explored and called the driest large area on earth, and the only one where a man can ride along mile after mile, day after day, without seeing a single living thing, plant or animal.

The desert is brown and gray—and glaring white where the salt beds and the nitrate deposits throw the sun into a man's eyes. And sometimes, when the rising or the setting

sun strikes the shabby-looking hills that lie wrinkled like the legs of a thousand-year-old turtle, it bursts into greens and blues and pinks, so varied and so riotous that any painter who put them on canvas would be called a liar.

The Incas conquered the desert first, coming down from Peru and subjugating the Atacama Indians who lived in the same occasional oases where the white men have their villages today. The conquistadores came next. The desert was Bolivian once, and then Chile fought a war over it in 1879-1883, and made it her own and grew rich on the nitrate fields. And then, finally, American capital conquered it here and there, after the Panama Canal was finished and made it possible to exploit the untold wealth of western South America.

They gave me a job in Portorillos because they had a construction program going on. They were laying a pipe line up to the higher Andes, to bring a river down to the mine to provide water for the mill and the ore concentrator. They made me wet nurse to a camp of mules.

They had their hundreds of men out in the desert, blasting and moving dirt to prepare the terrain, driving mules to bring the sections of pipe into place, laying pipe, bolting it, smashing their fingers and their legs and being taken to the hospital. They had them bringing up supplies and food and tools in a steady stream, and they had me out there, twenty-five miles in the mountains, at the top of a cliff from which there was a sheer drop of thirteen hundred feet down to our supply camp.

Bare dirt, rock, shale, dust. No vegetation. The wind howled over the bare peaks, filling the air with yellow dust that clung in our eyebrows, clogged our nostrils, and covered our faces with masks. We slept on dust, we breathed it, we ate it, we dreamed it. The days were warm but at night we

needed a fire, for the elevation was well over eight thousand feet.

Yet there, on that bare peak, I was to witness one of the miracles of nature. There had been no rain within the memory of the present generation, but one day it came down, in fierce slanting sheets of silver against the black backdrop of a storm-sky. The gullies and quebradas leading down from the hills became roaring torrents, and the workmen fell on their knees to cross themselves and beg for mercy in this, the end of the world. I sought the doubtful shelter of my corrugated-iron shack, shivering, standing in a foot of cold water, waiting for the thunder and the lightning to pass and the rain to stop.

And then, one morning, I saw the real miracle. I got up and found that the whole country had changed its color. It was no longer gray and brown. It had taken on a greenish tinge, with a thin film of vegetation everywhere. The whole pampa and the slopes of the bare mountains were dotted with colorful flowers. For the seeds of life are there—everywhere in that desert. They are scattered in with the sand and are blown for miles with the wind. They lie dormant for years, but all they need is water to make them sprout fresh and green and lovely.

I was at the camp a year, and then the job was completed and I must move on. I was acclimated and physically hard. I was ready now, I felt, to start on my own.

The pipe line finished, the company sold the mules that had built it and that I had been tending so carefully for months. I had a year's stake in my pocket and I bought fourteen mules and a bell mare, one of the animals, my saddle mule, really a prize. I bought them cheap to go into business. I wanted a venture of my own, and so I arranged a contract

with the company to bring it ten thousand sheep a year from the other side of the mountains. I didn't know then that that is a lot of sheep. I didn't know that even five hundred are just about that many too many. I knew nothing whatever about sheep. I thought only in terms of the nice, round, beautiful money they were going to earn me.

I picked my men. Juan Hidalgo, a hardy Chilean, and Carlos Martinez. Carlos was a half-breed Indian chinchilla trapper who knew the trails over the mountains. He had attached himself to me as my personal servant and bodyguard. Juan didn't want him along, but there was nothing to be done; Carlos was going and nobody could stop him.

There was the matter of outfit to be bought. Cots, sleeping bags lined with vicuña skins, ponchos, our repeating shotguns, a Mannlicher rifle, revolvers, cooking utensils, food for ten days, hay and barley for the mules—endless mountains of stuff.

The time was October, spring in Chile, when the mountain passes were reported to be free of snow and travel to the other side could begin.

We rode away to the east. "Vaya con Dios!" they called after us as we left. We rode out into the scarred desert and we crossed the mountains into Argentina. But the good friends at Portorillos were never to see us again.

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## Chapter II

AFTER a long and arduous journey we rode into Fiambala in a proud cavalcade, myself prancing at the head as befitted the boss, Juan and Carlos bringing up the rear behind the bell mare and our long string of pack animals. I had a large, dappled, sorrel mule, sound, sure-footed, and beautifully proportioned. Never once had she let me down and now she rose to the occasion like a thoroughbred. Badly as she needed a rest, she seemed to know exactly what was expected of her. With half the town lined up to watch, she danced and snorted and shied at every object. People stood and gaped at her. Word spread that I had ridden her all the way over from Chile, and she became the talk of the town.

Fiambala is a one-street village about a mile long, surrounded by lush irrigated fields that seem like havens of peace to the traveler just arrived from the wilderness. The basin itself is semiarid—sand and stone, bunch grass, desert shrubs, cacti—but down by the river one revels in the sight and the smell of wheat, alfalfa, corn, oats, grapes, figs, oranges, pomegranates and olives.

It is one of these delightful and picturesque “jumping-off” towns that are so numerous in South America. Thirty miles to the south is the railhead of Tinogasta, where Fiambala ships its produce and gets its supplies. In the other direction are the mountains and the desert trails into Chile. Hence the town is the connecting link between the old means of transport and

the new, the place where goods are unloaded from trucks and loaded onto mules, the place where pack animals are bought, sold, and traded, where they are shod and packed for their treks over the Andes, where the sick are treated and the tired are rested between voyages—in pastures that are indescribably fresh and green.

We stayed in Fiambala at the charming home of Don Julio Quiroz, a wealthy rancher. After much bickering and discussion we bought five hundred sheep from him. They cost us four and a half pesos each, or about two dollars, and we hoped to get at least six dollars apiece for them from the mining company at Portorillos.

If I had consented to put my saddle mule in the deal, I am sure Don Julio would have given me the sheep. He offered me everything except his wife and ranch for the animal, but I refused to sell her at any price. I had to return; and as the sorrel had brought me safely over the mountains, I knew that I could trust my life to her again. Greatly attached to the animal, I felt then that I would never sell her.

With all negotiations completed, after eight days, Don Julio poured his sheep out of the corrals for us. Again we paraded down the sandy street of the town, with the population lined up to watch, but this time it was not the prancing exhibition it had once been. The five hundred bleating beasts that we were hoping to deliver safely in Chile had no intention whatever of going with us. They would go so far, and then a batch of them would decide to turn and go back, while another batch went up an alley, a third tried to invade a house, and a fourth kept right on going, placidly, as if nothing was happening. Lewd remarks and resounding cheers went up constantly from the side lines, as Juan and Carlos and I galloped our mules all over town, pushing this part of the herd



back into line only to have another part pop out again in some unexpected spot that we couldn't reach for sheep and houses and spectators.

We managed to get them out of town, but that first day was one of the hardest days' riding I have ever done. Of all the animals in this world, sheep are by far the silliest, the most asinine, the most provoking. We no sooner had them walking along obediently than one of them would "baa" and a batch of a hundred or so would start off in some new direction, hell-bent for leather to go nowhere in particular, pushing each other and falling all over themselves.

The comedy kept up all day and I was becoming seriously worried over the prospect of having to maintain that strenuous performance all the way over the Andes and across the vast expanse of Atacama Desert to Portorillos. But finally we found a solution. We discovered that one of the sheep, though he bleated more than the rest, had the compensating virtue of always staying on the road. Either he was more intelligent than the others or he had a martyr complex that made him accept the inevitable. When the rest bolted off in all directions, he just ambled along the trail, placidly chewing his cud or baaing his agony to the world. We named him "El Juez"—the Judge. We had brought along a spare bell for the mare, so we tied it around his neck and headed him out in front of the other sheep. That ended our immediate troubles; the others followed the judge and we could make better time.

Cattle trails, worn, pounded, and rutted, were everywhere, leading in all directions. Heaven knows how old they were. For a hundred years, at least, gauchos and vaqueros wearing heavy leather chaps had been driving Argentine beef over those trails to the settlements in the Chilean desert, to the oases where they were fattened after their arduous trip, to

the mining camps and the nitrate oficinas, to such cities as Copiapó. Twelve thousand head of beef a year had come to Chile over those trails in the heyday of the business, but they were driven on iron-shod hoofs to keep their feet from wearing out in the stony going.

When the going was good, Carlos sang. Nothing disturbed the evenness of his happy temper, and he sang hour after hour. He knew only one tune but an infinite number of verses. He never ran out of verses for that one endless "melody." He dug them up out of the depths of his memory and he probably made them up as he went—troubadour fashion. He sang of love and death, of hard labor and long voyages, and always of love again. He sang of Chile's politicians, of Yanqui engineers, of the curas, or priests, in his boyhood village, and then again, with a beautiful passion but a revolting off-key rendition—of love. In ribald moods he grew nasal and rose to superb heights of bawdy obscenity.

After four days we came to our first real resting place, Lake San Francisco, shimmering in the sun in the crater of an extinct volcano, out of the world and protected from the winds which blew over the tops of the surrounding mountains and left only stray breezes to ruffle the tranquil valley. Ducks and flamingos dotted the lake's surface, and around it was the luxuriant soft green of a meadow. The mules and the sheep were allowed to graze contentedly for a day, while we lazed in the warming sun and figured up the profits on our herding venture.

"Mula! Matcho! Bestia carajo! Tsha-a-ah!"

We were up with the sun and on the trail again, the bell mare placidly leading the way, the Judge ambling along at the head of his five hundred companions. The hardest part of the trip lay ahead.

The trail led upward in a long sweep, growing rougher and stonier, and then narrowed to a mere shelf on the side of a mountain. We had held our breaths going over this difficult passage on the way over—now we had it to make with half a thousand sheep which represented our fortune. The difficult stretch, sometimes rough and sometimes smooth stone, was a mile long, four feet wide, and seemed a hundred miles up in the air to the man who rode over it and looked down the sheer abyss on the left. There it dropped off vertically for three, four, five hundred feet, and the rocks at the bottom were strewn with the bleached bones of hundreds of animals—and perhaps men—that had in the course of the years lost their footing and plunged to their deaths. On the right the cliff towered interminably into the air, keeping the sun out of the entire valley and making it a place of gloom.

We stopped at the entrance to the passage, to adjust the packs and make them narrower. We could take no chances on our mules being brushed off into the deep. Would the sheep make it?

Carlos rode ahead with the bell mare. We headed El Juez after him, and Juan and I stayed behind to feed the bleating animals one by one onto the trail. If they should crowd—! If they should grow nervous and push—! If they should decide that they didn't like it there and try to turn around—! We held our breaths while the interminable procession ambled on, hoping almost against hope. But nothing happened. Eventually Juan and I brought up the rear with the pack mules and made it safely across.

"Mula! Matcho! Ande! Tsha-a-ah!"

Carlos loved to sing out to the mules, with an air of powerful authority in his voice. He did it every so often, even when they were going well, just to show who was boss.

For hour after hour, day after day, we rode along with no sign of human life. The towering Andean ranges were piled above and below us in magnificent confusion, gleaming white above the sharply delineated snow line, gleaming yellow occasionally where patches of sulphur showed at the tops of extinct volcanoes. The wind roared over the mountains and came tearing down some valley to hit us full force and threaten to pull us out of our saddles. Here and there, high over some particularly majestic peak, a royal condor soared in sweeping circles, never moving its outstretched wings and never varying the rhythm of its glides.

We began to encounter snow and glaciers as the trail climbed upward to thirteen or fourteen thousand feet and approached the crest of the mountains. Suddenly my mule shied as we picked our way across the base of a huge ice field.

I was riding in front and I stopped to see what had scared the animal. Then I jumped almost as badly as my mount had, for grinning up at me was a human face. I dismounted to examine it. It was a frozen cadaver, covered to the waist with snow and ice.

Juan and Carlos pulled up. The former scraped the snow away and discovered a knapsack beside the body. He looked inside for papers which might identify the unfortunate traveler. All he found was some fresh-looking meat, salt, and coca leaves, from the cocaine plant, which the natives chew incessantly to give them stamina and appease hunger and thirst.

I saw Juan examining the frozen meat closely. Then he dropped it and stared at me with a horrified expression.

"What's the matter, Juan?"

"It's human flesh. Look at the skin."

Juan was right. It was the dark skin of a human being. Interested, Carlos came up to peer at it.

"The skin is dark," he said with a profound professional air. "He was an Indian. He didn't taste so good."

"What do you mean?" I asked, shocked.

"Human beefsteak," said Carlos in his best lecture-platform manner, "is sweet enough, but it's much too stringy."

"How do you know?" I asked suspiciously, but he gave no sign of having heard. I dropped the matter. There was no telling where Carlos had obtained the vast fund of information and misinformation that he produced on every conceivable subject. Much of it, I knew, was from hearsay, a very small amount from the lessons of personal experience, and a vast store from the bottomless depths of his never-resting imagination. At any rate, it wasn't book-learning. Carlos could neither read nor write.

Juan, as usual, paid no attention to him.

"It is dangerous here in winter," he said. "Es bien peligroso. These two were probably caught in the snows and couldn't get out. They ran out of food and then one died—or maybe the other killed him ——"

He shrugged his shoulders and we rode on, leaving the body as we had found it. The sheep ambled placidly along, bunched together and sometimes crowding. Carlos looked at the sky with a knowing air. "My shoulder hurts," he said, apropos of nothing whatever. "It's going to snow."

Campsites were determined by the presence of water, and that night we made camp at a place called Barrancas Blancas, the White Banks. It was a fearsome place, at the foot of a colossal glacier that towered behind us a thousand feet and at a steep angle. At the base of this huge mountain was a small stream, the size of which depended on temperature and

consequent melting of the ice. That evening the weather was cold and the water was a mere trickle through an icy channel. The animals were thirsty but they could get only a few sips of water.

Near us was a small Indian hut, a chopana built of stones with a grass roof, round, about six feet in diameter and some four feet high. It looked none too clean and we decided to sleep in the open. Too tired to gather wood, we ate a supper of sardines and crackers, reclining on our cots.

I had noticed for some time that Juan talked with unusual effort, and now I saw that he ate almost nothing. It worried me. Although he was only five feet five inches tall, he was broad and strong as an ox. He was a Chilean, fifty-nine years old, with the complexion of a Scotch fisherman. He was honest, dependable, loyal, and an excellent worker. He was my main support, and indispensable.

"What's the matter, Juan?"

"Es nada. A bit of soroche." Altitude sickness.

But I knew that "a bit of soroche" can lay a man out cold and make all activity virtually impossible. I knew, too, that without Juan I couldn't go on.

The glacier towered over us—an awesome sight. The whole scene was unreal, like some eerie setting from another world. There was the glistening ice at our backs, the wide sweep of snowy mountains against the blackness of the night sky, great jagged peaks rearing themselves ominously above us. It was an unspeakably lonely and fearsome place. To add to the uncanniness, the big glacier trembled and groaned continuously and gave off loud reports like the crashing of cannon as its frozen crags split asunder. The wind howled across the snowy plain and buffeted us severely, even though we had tried to get in the lee of the ice. I was afraid.

Carlos offered Juan some garlic, his invariable "cure" for mountain sickness which he had tried on man and beast on the way over and which had never worked. Panting, Juan waved it away. I gave him five drops of ether in a little water, and he began to feel better.

The sun was setting behind the ranges in the west, bathing everything in a last red glow. Down the path the sheep were huddled in groups, their heads together. Carlos stood up; looked at the towering peaks with that professional air of his, sniffed once or twice, and looked perturbed. More because the place oppressed me than for any other reason, I felt worried. "Anything wrong?" I asked.

"It's going to snow," he said again, glancing at the sheep.

"Snow!" For once I was ready to believe him. I looked at Juan, but the latter just glanced at the sky and shook his head.

"What makes you think it's going to snow?" I said anxiously.

Carlos pointed to the distance. "When you see clouds around the tops of high peaks like that," he said, "look out. And look at those sheep. When you see them forming in groups like that and standing in circles with their heads in the center ——"

Juan interrupted, still panting from soroche: "They did that two nights ago."

Carlos paid no attention to him. "I have a pain in my shoulder too," he said. "It's always a sure sign of either rain or snow. But perhaps it will only be a flurry this time. It's late in the season for a big storm."

He picked up his cot and some of his belongings and started to move them into the old Indian hut.

"You two can sleep out here if you want," he said. "I'm getting under a roof."

Juan and I decided to leave our cots outside. The old Chilean's skepticism toward Carlos's dismal warnings had reassured me to a certain extent. Still, it was with nervous misgivings that I finally tossed myself to sleep.

About one o'clock I woke, my worst fears justified. Cold drops were falling on my face. I pulled back the flap of my sleeping bag and discovered that it was snowing. I could hear Juan moving around in the dark. He came over to my cot and spoke to me very softly. "Patrón, are you awake? It's snowing, patrón. It's best that we move in with Carlos."

"Yes, Juan. I know it's snowing. What's going to happen to us now?"

He didn't answer. We picked up our gear and moved into the chopana. Carlos, only half awake in there, seemed to chuckle, delighted that for once he had been right.

"This shoulder is giving me the devil," he said, grinning. "It's never failed me yet. It's a sure sign of snow."

Oppressed by nervous forebodings, I finally went to sleep. I woke early to find the other two dressing.

"How's the weather?"

"Terrible. No chance of traveling today."

I looked outside. The snow was coming down relentlessly in thick flakes, and drifting high here and there. I could see a few of our animals moving around, but they seemed dim and ghostly.

No chance of traveling. No knowing when we could travel. We couldn't have found a worse place in which to be snowbound.

On the way over we had left a few sacks of barley at Barrances Blancas. Juan went out to feed the mules.

The better part of the day we spent holed up against the storm in the dark and dirty little chopana that was so low



that a man couldn't stand up in it, fretting about the sheep outside. Only the irrepressible Carlos refused to give in to gloom. He began to entertain us with a long story about a time when he was trapping chinchillas and was snowed in for three weeks.

"In a house just like this one. For three weeks, señor, I couldn't leave that place. I was all alone and my food gave out after two weeks."

"I suppose you went without eating for a week," interposed Juan sarcastically.

"No, señor. I ate my bridle and my saddle. I made a soup out of the leather and that is all I had. I didn't have anybody with me," he said, glancing ominously at Juan, "like that fellow we found out there in the snow."

Juan snorted in disgust. "You should have used your hatband. If it was as greasy as the one you have now it would have made a wonderful soup."

During those long hours and the days that followed Carlos never lost his cheerfulness. His fund of stories and bits of lore, information, misinformation, dreams, and lies, about life in general and the country of the higher Andes, was inexhaustible. He told about his life as a trapper, about the priest who came twice a year to say mass in his native village for high fees in money, sheep, and wine, about the itinerant Turcos, or Syrians, who travel all over those rough mountain trails, each with a pack mule loaded with goods that are peddled from one Indian village to another.

"Señor," he said one time. "You have no idea what a wealthy country this is. Immense. There is everything in these mountains if you know where to look for it."

I knew he was winding up for a story and I let him go. Finally, after a pause, it came.

"I know where there is a gold mine," he announced dramatically.

"A what?"

"A gold mine. Near Lake San Francisco where we camped. I found it one time when I was trapping chinchillas, and I took a whole handful of nuggets out of it. A marvelous thing, señor. Pure gold. I sold it to a Turco a few days later but I didn't tell him where I'd found it."

"What did you do with the mine, Carlos?" I asked him.

He shrugged his shoulders. "It is one of those things, señor. All this time I've been thinking about that mine, and dreaming of going back there, but there never seems to be a chance. Someday I shall go there and load a pack mule with nuggets, and come out and be rich. I shall have a finca of my own then, and fields, and mules, and horses, and sheep—well, perhaps not sheep. I shall be rich and you shall visit me in my house."

Juan snorted. As plainly as if he'd said it in words, the snort said: "A likely story, indeed."

Outside, we could not see more than three feet in any direction. It had grown colder and the snow was now fine, falling and driven by the wind. It formed an opaque curtain that shut out everything. We could see neither mules nor sheep. The whole atmosphere seemed to be filled with white powder. I heard a bell but could not tell whether it was El Juez's or the mare's.

I started in the direction from which the sound had come and found Juan bringing in the mare. We could see one mule and could hear others near by. Then we lost the camp. "You stay with the mare and I'll call when I find the chopana," I told Juan.

I stumbled about for fifteen minutes or so before I found

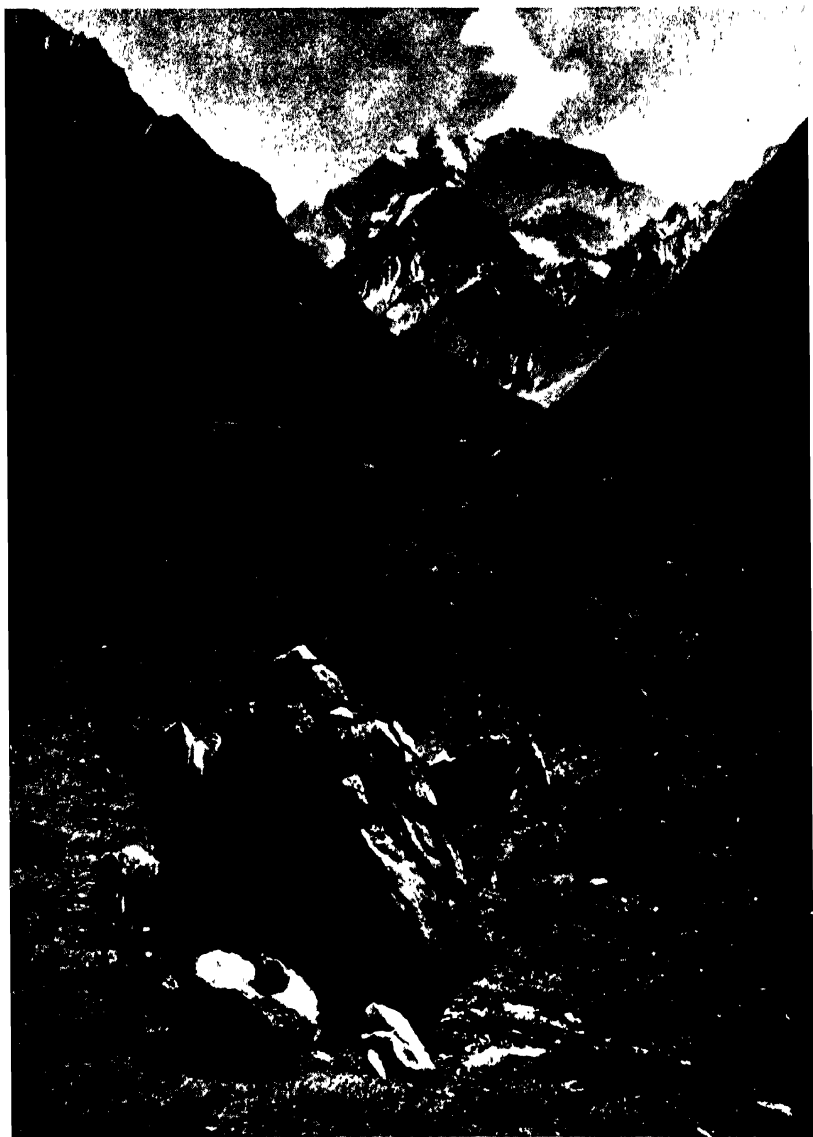
the depression made by the brook; I followed it and came to the camp in a moment. I called Juan and he came up with the mules. We tried to get them to eat some grain, but they were too thirsty to do more than nibble. They stood with outstretched necks, opening their mouths into the wind to catch a bit of snow. All the mules had followed the mare into camp, so we breathed a little easier.

Carlos went out to look for the sheep. He said he would bring back firewood. During the trying days that were to follow he proved his worth to us and his knowledge of the Andes many times over. In about an hour he came in, laden with wood. Only a man who knows the Andes can find the wood, at least in weather such as we were having. It is the root of a dead plant and is about two feet long; the top reminded me of a ripe sunflower, spread out even with the surface of the soil. Sometimes it is nearly buried. The roots are easy to pull out and make excellent fuel.

When he came in Carlos told us he had found the sheep. They were huddled together on the sheltered side of a cliff near the glacier. But he had difficulty getting wood, and only after much searching had he found a place blown clear of snow. Later Juan and I went to help him. For hours we carried wood until we were ready to drop with exhaustion. We had no means of knowing how long we would be snowbound, and we had to get all the fuel we could before the wind covered the clear spot with snowdrifts.

The next day it snowed harder than ever. I spent the whole day melting snow in a pan over the fire. It was a slow task but by night I was able to give each of the mules about a gallon of water. For ten days this was my chore, providing a few swallows of water for the miserable beasts. I did not attempt watering the sheep. I knew that was impossible. All we had





The giant of the Andes, Aconcagua, the loftiest mountain in the Americas, which rises to a height of 22,850 feet. In this section of the Andes lesser peaks of 18,000 to 20,000 feet are numerous.

was a two-gallon pot, and each potful of snow melted down to a few cups of water.

Finally, on the morning of November 21, a month and three days after our departure from Portorillos, we arose to a clear, calm day with the sun sparkling on a thousand snow fields in the towering mountain ranges. We had a clear view for the first time in ten days. Large areas were free of snow, but between them it was banked in great drifts.

I looked down the trail toward the sheep. There was no need for going near them. I could see that their condition was dreadful. They had been without food or water during the entire storm. Carcasses were strewn everywhere in the snow. A few pitiful bunches of animals were huddled desolately near the cliff.

"Juan, get to work and pack up. We have to get out of here."

"Where to, patrón?" He looked at me dubiously. "These sheep can't make it to Chile."

"They can't stay here either. Back. We have to go back to Lake San Francisco and fatten them up on the pasture."

"We can't do that, patrón. That ledge on the mountain is snowed over now. We can't get these sheep over it."

That ledge on the mountain! Juan was right.

Carlos looked with an appraising air at the glacier that towered above us. Its sides gleamed and sparkled in the morning sun. Snow clung to all the cracks and crevices.

"We must get away, patrón," said Carlos. "The sun is getting higher and when it begins to warm things up all that snow will begin to slide. There will be nothing left of any of us."

I had a fleeting memory of the cadaver we had found on the way over.

"You're right, Carlos. Get to work, boys. Get those sheep out of the drifts. Shoot the ones that are too weak to travel."

Frantically we worked for hours, getting ready to move, hauling sheep out and setting them on their feet, shooting the weak, packing the mules. Our hands were numb from constant contact with the snow and our wet clothes clung to us and impeded our movements. But at last we could head the bell mare and El Juez up the return trail. There were a hundred and eighty sheep left.

"Mula! Matcho! Bestia carajo! Ande! Tsha-a-ah!"

This was not the lively caravan that had started from Fiambala with so much exuberant confusion some two weeks before. This was a beaten, sad retreat. At times the trail was open for miles at a stretch, but here and there were great banks of snow that had to be cleared. We climbed off our mules to shovel and then climbed on again, bruised and dead-tired, to advance a few miles or a few hundred feet. The sheep stumbled forward on weakened legs, too tired, too beaten to complain.

Finally we came to the dangerous shelf along the mountain. There was no chance of passing it. Great drifts lay all the way across it, sloping down to the gaping abyss at the right. We stared at it in discouragement.

Carlos was the first to rouse himself.

"We can't stay here. We have to cross it. There's no other way."

Juan looked at him but said nothing.

"Give me that stewpan," Carlos said. Gingerly he advanced on the first of the drifts, knowing well that the slightest slip meant a fatal plunge into the canyon. He began to shovel a path through the loose top snow, but underneath was an older and harder drift.

"Patrón! Come with the machete."

Hour after hour we worked to clear a way, Carlos with the stewpan and I with a machete, while Juan tended the animals. Again and again we fell where the going was icy, and barely saved ourselves from dropping over the edge of the cliff. Those heaps of bleached bones down there in the gloomy canyon, three or four hundred feet vertically below us, were all too grim as reminders of the danger we were in. Yet Carlos went on steadily, from drift to drift, shoveling away with a steady, easy motion, as though unaware of anything but the job ahead. We had to get ourselves and our mules and our sheep across that perilous stretch. Nothing else seemed to matter. He lost his footing, fell, found some precarious hold with his fingernails, pulled himself back from the edge, got up, took his stewpan, and resumed his work. Filled with a growing admiration, I kept behind him, loosening the snow with my machete, slipping, falling, picking my bruised and tired body up again to resume the job.

At last we had all the drifts cleared away from that whole mile of dangerous going. But about the ice on the trail we could do nothing. It was there and we had to take our chances on it.

We headed the animals onto the trail, the bell mare first with Carlos, and El Juez after her. The mare stepped gingerly and fearfully, often stopping to examine the situation before she would give in to Carlos's urgings and go on. Carlos was no longer swearing; he was talking to the mare—softly, insistently, encouragingly. Frightened and obviously nervous, she was using her head. She didn't shy; she didn't rear. Keeping her eyes open and her wits about her, she merely stopped to examine the situation whenever necessary, felt the ground ahead, planted her feet as firmly as possible on the icy surface,



and went on to the tune of encouraging clucks. It was the most magnificent example of teamwork between man and beast that I have ever seen.

And all this time El Juez plodded after those two, unconcernedly, step by step, stopping when they stopped, going when they went, just going on as though nothing could shake him out of his placidity—ever.

Again Juan and I fed the sheep onto the trail one by one, in a long single file, the animals spaced about four feet apart.

They were all on. Proceeding at snail's pace, but proceeding. We could see them stretched out in a brave line almost a quarter of a mile long, making their way over the ice and through the shadows and through our paths in the drifts, with the vertical cliff towering over them on their left and the sheer drop on their right, leading to death hundreds of feet below. They were on and they were going. Juan and I were exultant. We headed the pack mules onto the trail and followed them in our saddles. Now it was up to the sheep themselves. Nobody could reach them and nobody could help them until they had reached the end of the ledge. From far ahead we could hear the throaty clanging of the two bells, the mare's and the Judge's.

Then it happened—suddenly. Far up the line one of the sheep lost its footing. While it scrambled to get up again, another fell on top of it. A third stopped, and the fourth tried to push past. With a rush all four slid over the edge of the cliff and plummeted into the canyon, bleating piteously, and breaking themselves on the rocks below.

An electric shock seemed to pass through the entire herd when the first agonized *ba-a-ah* came floating up from the animals plunging to their deaths. Suddenly all the sheep were nervous. They pushed in groups, fighting for position against

the inner cliff. They stopped and tried to turn around and go back. They stumbled, fell on top of each other, slid, and went over the side. One here, two there; another somewhere else, and then three or four at once, crying their agony and twisting in mid-air as they went down feet uppermost. Juan and I could do nothing but watch in horror.

Unconcerned, the pack mules stopped as if to look on at the shambles ahead. Terrified, the bleating sheep crowded toward the inner cliff wall, pushing each other away, down, and over the canyon's side. At first we tried to count them as they went, but soon they were going over too fast. It was a scene of incredible confusion. Mingled with the terrified cries from the trail were a few weak baas from the canyon below, where some of the broken animals on the rocks had not yet died.

It seemed like an age to us. Actually it took only a few minutes; when the confusion was over, the remaining sheep stood shivering by the rock wall, no longer pushing. All this time Carlos had gone steadily on with the bell mare and El Juez. He had been fully aware of the tragedy behind him, but he had realized that the only thing he could do was to keep the two animals in his charge from losing their heads. Gently but insistently he urged the mare forward, encouraging her with soft words and reassuring clucks. Placidly the Judge followed him.

We could still hear his bell. One by one the remaining sheep straggled after him to pick their way over the perilous trail in a decimated and vastly shorter line. At the other end, where the trail widened, we took inventory. We had sixty-seven sheep left.

Discouraged and unutterably weary, we pushed on. When we finally reached the lake, long shadows of the mountains were cutting across it in the evening sun.

## *Chapter III*

LAKE SAN FRANCISCO was a veritable paradise—out of the world, far removed from all troubles, a haven of peace and rest, complete by itself in its encircling bowl of mountains. We camped in two spacious caves in a towering rock that jutted up on one side. It looked like a feudal castle. A hot spring seeped out of the lava near our apartment.

I rose early the next day, while Carlos and Juan still slept, and went out to revel in the spreading warmth of the morning sun and in the peaceful scene. The mules and the sheep were in the luxuriant green meadow. Most of them had eaten their fill and were lying down, their eyes half shut with contentment.

The lake, three or four miles long and about a mile wide, was shallow, ice-cold, crystal-clear, and an iridescent blue in its setting of lush vegetation. Around it, here and there, a white cotton-puff of steam rose lazily into the quiet air, where a boiling-hot spring came to the surface to empty itself down the rocks into the waters below. Thousands on thousands of ducks swam on the water or volplaned into the air and came down again. Great colonies of flamingos stood in the marsh grass near shore, their pink plumage standing out sharply against the other riotous colors, their necks gracefully arched as they fed.

I poked along, exploring, and suddenly came on seven ostriches, the South American rhea, three-toed, smaller than

the African ostrich, but strong and swift nevertheless. They stood and stared at me for an instant, only a hundred feet away. Then they ran off, their bodies wobbling from side to side, but their feet covering ground and carrying them rapidly to disappear over the hills.

A duck waddled out of a clump of grass ahead of me. In her nest were five eggs. Hunting around, I soon had my hat filled with eggs.

"Juan! Carlos! Up and at them. Scrambled eggs for breakfast!"

We were all tired of canned salmon, cheese, crackers and corned beef. Here, in our Eden, was all the change and all the fresh food we wanted. We lazed over our breakfast, drinking numberless cups of coffee, smoking cigarettes in deep, grateful draughts, basking in the beautiful scene. Nobody said a word about plans for the future. Nobody wanted to. For the present we had peace and comfort and plenty. That was enough.

I went out with a gun after breakfast and shot three ducks. I took off my shoes and socks to wade out and retrieve them. Coming back to the bank, through water about a foot deep, I felt a sudden, sharp pain in my legs. I looked down but could see no insects or snakes in the water. I started to run and the pain increased. When I splashed out on land I saw that my shins were bleeding. Back, on the surface of the lake, was a trail of blood. Near shore the lake had a thin coating of ice, so fine that I could hardly see it, but strong enough and sharp enough to cut my legs severely.

We loafed for weeks, lolling in the grass, watching the sheep become fat enough to be eaten, gathering eggs, shooting an occasional duck, and digging into our supply of canned food only when we wanted to relieve the monotony. One

morning, while exploring at the upper end of the lake, we came across an ostrich nest containing five eggs and took two of them back to camp. We scrambled one for supper but it tasted half rotten, so we threw it away. The next morning Carlos took charge. He scrambled the other egg with garlic in the grease to kill the strong taste. We told ourselves that it was quite good that way, but we returned to our duck diet just the same.

A family of chinchillas came regularly to play and feed at the base of the big rock where we had our cavern. I liked to sit and watch them, they were such rare and odd little animals. But they aroused the trapper instinct in Carlos, who was hurt because I would not let him catch them.

"But, patrón," he protested, "the skins of these four little animals will make up what we lost on the sheep."

"Carlos, you know very well that it's against the law to trap them."

The idea of obeying a law, away up there in the wilderness, seemed almost fantastic to him. "Nobody will know it, patrón. I know men who buy the skins contraband."

He told me that those little pieces of fine and soft gray fur were worth up to two hundred dollars each. I could see his agony as it gradually dawned on him what two hundred times four amounted to. Again and again he looked at the animals longingly and then looked sideways at me. But I only smiled and shook my head.

His chagrin never lasted long. Soon he would be singing again, that same unvarying tune with the endless number of verses. One time, after he had just got through singing something highly uncomplimentary about a Chilean politician, he suddenly stopped short to look at me.

"Do you know what it would be nice to be, señor?"

"No, what?"

"A politico."

I laughed. "A politico! His Excellency, Señor Carlos Martinez, President of the Republic of Chile. Carlos, would you give me a job?"

"No, señor," he said. "I'd like to be President of the United States."

"Of the United States?"

His eyes had that dreamy faraway look in them. "Yes. Caramba! what a rich country you have, señor. Think of the money. Think of what your President can steal from the public! Just one year, señor. Only six months would be enough. Wouldn't you like to be President of your country only six months?"

Juan's hunting instincts were aroused too. He and I were out walking one day when he suddenly stopped dead still and pointed ahead.

"Vicuñas," he said with ill-concealed excitement. "Grab your rifle. Vicuñas!"

There, about a hundred and fifty yards away, a herd of the long-necked animals stood looking at us.

I motioned to Juan to be quiet, but made no move to reach for the gun. He danced up and down in his impatience and all but snatched it away from me. Suddenly the vicuñas gave a nervous start, turned tail, and bounded out of sight over the hill. Juan's face was long with disappointment.

"Why didn't you shoot, patrón?"

"It's against the law to kill them," I said with some irritation.

For centuries Indians had been hunting those graceful and alert little tan and white wild cousins of the domesticated llama. They had eaten the meat and spun and woven the wool.

Then civilization had discovered the beautiful soft skins and they had gone into women's fur coats. The difficulty was that only a small piece from the neck of each animal had been used for that purpose, that hundreds of vicuñas had had to be killed to make one expensive coat, and that the beasts had therefore been almost exterminated. Hence their present legal protection.

But Juan, as I discovered, hadn't wanted to kill the vicuñas just for sport or their skins. There were no predatory animals near Lake San Francisco, and the idea of hunting for sport seemed alien to the very setting and atmosphere of the place. He had wanted a change in diet, and his reply to my warning was the nearest that either of my companions ever came to grumbling about circumstances.

"Yes," he said disdainfully. "A game warden is likely to see us. Vicuñas are mighty fine eating. A stomach that is filled with ducks and duck eggs, day after day, knows no conscience."

We returned to the camp and looked over our stock. One of the sheep looked fat enough to be eaten. We killed it. Licking their chops in anticipation Juan and Carlos roasted half of it. We ate all they had cooked, in a gluttonous orgy.

I went for a hot bath, at the place where our thermal spring tumbled into the icy lake to bring its water up to a really delightful temperature. On the way back, picking my way naked through the meadow, I discovered a duck with ducklings. The old duck waddled off, leaving five of the cutest and fluffiest little creatures I have ever seen. I took them back and we kept them in the cave with us, in a box lined with wool, where they slept and where we fed them. They were like little puffballs. When they were a few days older they began to follow us around, and to mingle with

the chinchillas that came out to play in the evenings. When they were old enough to fly they would take wing in front of the cave and sail down to the lake to swim around with the other ducks. But they always returned to the camp for food, and always came back in the evening to sleep in their wool-lined nest.

So the time went in idyllic inactivity, with neither thought nor worry for the future. There was no thought of taking the few remaining sheep to Chile. On Christmas Day we prepared a feast. We had sheep's head vinaigrette—or almost vinaigrette—roasted leg of lamb, roasted potatoes, rice (Juan always wanted rice), canned peas, canned pineapple and coffee. One of the sheep—there were only a few ewes—had given birth to a lamb, and that morning Juan got a little milk from her, which we used in our coffee.

We were lying on our backs, resting from the ordeal of gluttony, smoking, and chewing the tender ends of the grass. Carlos began to spin bucolic dreams.

"Patrón," he said, "it would be nice to have a finca of one's own. Imagine it—a nice little house, and green fields around it, and mules and horses and chickens—and sheep—no?—yes," he corrected himself almost defiantly, "and sheep."

"And a wife, Carlos?"

"She will come later. If a man has a finca, with pasture and alfalfa, with apple trees and grapes and figs, and with chickens and other animals, he can't help getting a wife. The women will all come flocking around because they think it's an insult to them when a man lives alone and does his own housework. One doesn't need to be in a hurry about those things. One needs only to settle down and go to work, and the rest will take care of itself."



"Carlos, you're an insufferable egotist."

He paid no attention.

"It will be nice, señor," he went on. "I can sit back in my own house and watch them come by and take my time. Then after a while I can select the youngest and the most beautiful and the strongest of the lot. And then when the priest comes by he can marry ——"

Suddenly he stopped as if struck by a thought.

"Señor," he said slowly, going off on a tangent with one of those innumerable bits of advice he was always giving me, "if there is a cura around and you have a good-looking woman, don't ever let her out of your sight. Those curas ——"

Juan, who was somewhat more religious, let out an indignant snort.

"When are you going to do all this?" I asked. "It takes money to buy a finca."

"I must tell you, señor," he said slowly, to let it soak in. "A few years ago I was going into Bolivia, to trade burros for coco leaves. And in the Argentine province of Salta I came through a valley. But such a valley, señor."

He paused awhile: "It was even better than this. It was bigger and nearer to market and more fertile. It was green with grass, and there were trees in it, and there was a fine river running through it."

"Is that where you're going, Carlos?"

"I was just thinking, señor. It is not very far from here. Perhaps ten or twelve days without sheep. There is nobody living in the valley. Why don't we go up there and home-stead? With our mules and the mare and these sheep we could have a wonderful start."

I hated to blast his dream, but I had to point out to him

what he had evidently forgotten—that mules don't reproduce and most of our sheep were gelded. With a reluctant sigh he gave up the beautiful idea.

We got up to shoot a few ducks for supper. In the evening, over the stewpot's fragrant aroma, Carlos was again bursting with an idea.

"My gold mine is not very far from here," he announced suddenly.

"Your what?"

"My gold mine. The place where I found the nuggets. It is full of gold and I have always wanted to go back there and make myself rich. Why don't we go there now and fill our pockets with gold?"

Here was something that interested me. "Tell me more about this mine."

"I told you, up there at Barrancas Blancas. I was there two years ago and I picked up a handful of nuggets in just an hour or so. Three hundred grams, señor. Probably more. Probably I was cheated. I sold the gold to a Turco and those fellows always cheat a man. I'm sure I had more than three hundred grams—" Carlos pondered this new idea for a moment, growing indignant as he thought about the gross injustice. "Those Turcos. Did I tell you about the time one of them came to our village to sell cotton cloth ——"

"Let it go, Carlos. I want to hear about the mine. Where is this place?"

He waved his hand airily. "Off over there. It's not far. I can take you right to it."

For weeks I had lazily and unsuccessfully been casting about for something definite to do. Suddenly I found myself spurred into an urgent desire for action. To go out for sheep and come back with a gold mine ——

"Carlos," I said, "I think you've got something there."

"How will we divide it?" Juan roused himself to say.

"Even," I answered.

Carlos began to object. "It's my mine—" Then he checked himself. "We're all together and there's plenty of gold. Even. We'll divide it even. Every man gets as much as every other."

Juan grunted and lay back as if to sleep, saying nothing while the other warmed up to his subject to the point where he had the three of us spending the first proceeds of the mine in one grand display of fireworks among the cafés of Santiago.

The next morning we set out for the mine. "Near" the lake turned out to be seven hours' ride, which meant that we would be away two days. But we stowed our packsaddles and belongings in the cave and left the sheep and the pack mules grazing peacefully, with no fear of marauders.

About two o'clock in the afternoon, after a disagreeable journey, we arrived at the location of the mine. There had been no trail. We followed Carlos up and down through canyons and over rocks. Many times we had to dismount and let the mules scramble through the best way they could.

On our arrival, Carlos told us to wait for him, which we did willingly, for we were both tired. He climbed up the face of a steep cliff to a ledge that jugged out a few feet. We could see a pile of loose fine rocks which had fallen from higher up the mountain. Carlos began to search in this pile and to pick up stones. I immediately began to get suspicious of his gold mine. Nuggets usually are not found in decomposing rock.

He came down and with a delighted smile handed me the specimens he had collected. I felt keen disappointment as soon as I saw them, and a burst of anger swept through me.

But in a moment our good-fellowship returned and the anger changed to laughter as I handled the stones. The more I looked at them the more I laughed. And when I remembered that I had more than suspected that the gold mine would turn out this way, I laughed harder than ever.

Both Juan and Carlos were looking at me with serious expressions on their faces. The more I laughed the more worried they looked. They thought, I suppose, that the sight of so much gold had turned my head. So when I saw their sober faces, I gave vent to fresh gales of laughter.

"Why are you laughing?" Juan finally asked, a bit fearfully.

I gasped for breath. "This is just the kind of gold we should have expected to find at Carlos's gold mine. It's fool's gold!"

"What do you mean—fool's gold?" asked Carlos, bridling.

I repented my touch of bitterness a moment later, for Carlos looked so miserable.

"I'm going up there anyway and gather as much of this stuff as I can before dark," he said with sudden determination.

"Don't you believe me when I tell you that stuff is no good?" I asked him.

"Maybe not to you," he answered. "But my Turco will buy it. I told you I sold him three hundred grams two years ago."

"Of this stuff? You did him in. And you thought he'd cheated you. You'd better not go back to that fellow."

"All right, then," answered Carlos. "I'll find one who hasn't been stung." He went back up to his "mine," with Juan and myself making fire and brewing coffee, while loose stones rattled down the slopes as Carlos pawed about in the shale on the ledge.

As we sipped our coffee and smoked cigarettes, Juan and

I discussed plans for the future. We decided to prospect over the eastern slope of the Andes, although as a matter of fact that side is not considered rich in minerals. But we were both in love with San Francisco and the easy pastoral life at the lake, and prospecting seemed as good an excuse for staying as any other.

At dusk Carlos came down with almost a kilo of iron pyrites which he wrapped in a rag and placed in his saddle-bag. He did not mention the mine again, and long afterwards I learned of two Syrians to whom he tried to sell the stuff. They were too wise for him, and I saw him covertly throw it out in the street at Tinogasta, Argentina.

We slept there at the foot of Carlos's pyrite lode. The cold mountain air was conducive to sleep, and I never have slept so well or so restfully as I did during my habitation in the Andes. Early in the morning we started back to our cavern "hacienda." The return trip seemed less hazardous, probably because we knew what to expect. At one o'clock we were at the top of the mountain which circles around almost without a break to form the crater in which lies Lake San Francisco. We dismounted at the summit to enjoy the panorama. Stretching away before us was an unbroken view into Argentina, and down the east slope of the Andes. The mountains dwindled away before us until the distant foothills disappeared in the haze. It looked like an enormous relief map of the earth.

I had lost my altimeter, but I estimated our altitude by the temperature of boiling water, at about fifteen thousand feet. The lake at our feet presented a beautiful sight, with flamingos and ducks flying about over it, and our own animals grazing peacefully on its shores.

We found everything as we had left it at Camp except



*Globe Photo, Pan*

On the high, mountain-walled pampas of the Andes, the llama is the principal burden-bearer as well as the source of much of the wool for the native costumes. The llama can go for a long time without water and can carry a load of a hundred pounds or more.



for the beans. They were scattered all over the place. Carlos, of course, blamed the chinchillas. But it did not matter, because the beans had been useless to us anyway. We had tried to cook them but, because of the altitude, even after hours over the fire they were as hard as when they were put in the pot.

Having once started, we plunged into activity with an almost furious energy. Day after day we rode out, up one canyon and down another, dismounting and scrambling on foot, poking our noses into all the inaccessible places we could find, exploring the entire countryside. Every cliff was a challenge, and every dark or light spot in the mountains was a flaming beacon that roused our hopes and made us scramble after the vast riches that lay at the end of the rainbow.

We were hard and fit, and we loved it. If we fell and slid down mountainsides, tearing our hands and our clothes, if we found ourselves squeezed into oppressively narrow rock clefts from which it was almost impossible to get out, that was all part of the game and added to the good-fellowship.

"Mira, mira, patrón! Look—there's a long white streak on that mountain. We must go and see what it is!"

Carlos was forever seeing mines in the distance, and Juan and I followed him everywhere into the trackless wilderness. It didn't matter, in those days, whether we found anything or not. We were having a glorious vacation, and all during those many weeks we didn't see a single other human being.

It didn't matter whether we found anything or not—that is—until we *did* find something. Then we were suddenly transformed into millionaire mine-owners again, jerked back into the world of business and industry and riches.

We had been riding our mules up a canyon that kept get-



ting rougher and narrower until the going was so bad that the animals couldn't make it any longer. We had dismounted and hobbled the mules, scrambling forward on foot over huge boulders and up almost vertical cliffs. We had squeezed painfully through a narrow part, and there, beyond, we had found something that looked good.

It was a vein of galena, or sulphide of lead, about four feet wide. The ore was heavy and looked as if it contained plenty of silver. And there was plenty of it. We traced the vein over the mountain for about a mile and a half.

Excited as a bunch of schoolboys, we stood and hefted the samples in our hands. Even as we stood and talked, the whole scene transformed itself into a busy mining camp. We could see the shovels digging into the mountain, the blasting, the tunneling. We peppered the scene with living quarters, rock crushers, a reduction plant belching smoke into the clear air, with ourselves looking down on the whole works, growing fat and wealthy and smugly proprietary.

Too elated to feel tired after our strenuous day, we rode the ten miles back to our camp. Carlos was spending his money right and left. He started out with a thoroughly satisfactory spree in all the capitals of South America, leaving a cluttered trail of hearts and liquor bottles, equally empty and broken. But by the time we arrived at our cave he was ready to settle down. By then he was investing the remainder of his share of loot in fincas, scattered all over the country. In the last analysis Carlos always was a landed proprietor on a lavish scale.

Next morning we held a council of war. It was about time to leave our paradise, and I had decided to go to Argentina. Willy-nilly, Carlos decided to go with me. But he needed a passport and had to go back to Chile for it, to get it in

Copiapó. "And besides," he said, "I want to see my girl. Patrón, you should see her. Es cosa bien rara." A rare specimen—said with the knowing air of the most worldly connoisseur.

"She'll have plenty of time to weep over a man like you," said Juan the family man.

"All right, Carlos," I interrupted. "You go ahead and tend to your business. But take some samples of our mine along, and stop at Portorillos for an assay. We've got to know what's there."

Happily he ambled off, taking a saddle mule and two pack animals, singing verses about love in his interminable song.

For twelve days Juan and I killed time in camp, making reins and bridles. He was an expert at this and soon taught me how to do it. We put sheepskins in water and left them there until the wool was easy to scrape off, then we stretched the skins until they were dry. We cut the raw hide into threadlike strands, then moistened and braided them. They wove into beautiful reins and bridle straps; sometimes we used as many as forty-two strands.

We decided to do no more prospecting until we heard the results of the assay from Carlos. Neither Juan nor I had ever felt better. The weather was perfect, the days filled with sunshine, although it got cold at night. Every morning there was a coating of ice on the lake. We felt in perfect shape on a diet that was made up almost exclusively of meat, rice and bread.

Finally Carlos came back. He was happy as a lark and we could see even before he told us that he had good news.

"The engineers at Portorillos," he said, almost bubbling over, "los ingenieros, they wanted to know the worst way

where this mine is. I told them I didn't know. I told nobody where it is."

"What's in it, Carlos? What does the assay say?"

"Silver, patrón. Lots and lots of silver. Lead and silver, and we're all rich."

We sat around the campfire that night, spinning beautiful dreams and plans and looking forward to a future filled with untold wealth. Everything was rosy and we decided to start working the mine at once.

"We'll need more supplies and a lot of tools," said Juan. "What do you say to going up and working it for a week or so? Maybe we can get enough silver out of it to pay for our equipment."

We were all well fed and exceedingly contented. Life seemed very pleasant, until Carlos spoke up. He had been lying back looking at the stars among the great peaks of the Andes. He blew a stream of smoke, and asked, "How are we going to get our ore out?"

Juan and I stared in consternation. We had never thought of that. The nearest railroad was about a hundred and fifty miles away, and the closest decent road was at least half that distance. There was not even a trail to the mine. A railroad would cost millions, and a wagon road would cost—well, it would cost too much. We thought of the route to the mine. Suddenly the realization came to us—only men, or condors, could be used as pack animals to our mine!

All our high hopes had been brought down crashing.

Then I suggested, "Let's not give up. Let's get some negotiations started. Let's sell the prospect."

"Yes, and get nothing out of it," said Juan dully.

"Well, what can we do with it?" I asked.

"Yes, what can we do with it?" echoed Carlos.

"Before I'd be done out of it, I'd leave it where it is," replied Juan bitterly.

"Maybe in Buenos Aires I might interest some capitalists in samples," I offered.

Juan brightened. "That's better. Take some samples with you. The engineers say it's good stuff. Show it to them. They can send their own engineers to look at it. You come along with them and I'll meet you here."

Our problem seemed solved. Surely no man looking for good mining investment could afford to turn down our property.

We were wealthy again!

## Chapter IV

DURING those long idyllic months at the lake we had seen only one other human being. He had been an Indian llama herder, walking in bare, sandaled feet over a distant trail, his fifty or sixty animals going along with that curious plunging gait of theirs, heads bobbing back and forth at the ends of long necks. Thrilled at the sight of a man, we had hailed him from the distance, but he had merely looked at us and then gone his own way.

I had been disappointed. "You'd think he'd have enough curiosity to want to come and look us over."

Carlos, who knew his mother's race, had explained the man's apparent shyness. "He's got work to do. Why should he stop to gossip with strangers? That's the way these Indians are. They tend to their own business. But every Indian within a hundred miles knows we're here. Chances are they've been watching us. They've been talking about us night after night in their villages."

"Within a hundred miles? Are there many people living near here?"

"There's a village not fifteen miles from here, near the Fiambala trail. The only reason those people haven't been up here to hunt and to pasture their animals is that they saw us. They don't like to mix too much with strangers."

I had known all along, of course, that the Andes were not depopulated, but it had been almost a shock, up there in our out-of-the-world Eden-in-a-bowl, to hear of other men

living within a half day's journey of our retreat, tilling their fields, herding their flocks, raising their children, taking care of their old, burying them and being taken care of and buried in turn, for century after century, in the endless cycle of every permanently established settlement.

All through the Andes one finds those little pockets of Indians living a life almost entirely apart from that of the white man and impinging on it only occasionally. They are forgotten remnants of the ancient Inca empire that Pizarro and Almagro destroyed. They speak Quechua, the language of the Incas, they look like Incas, they still preserve parts of the old Inca dress. They live by their fields, and they herd sheep, horses, and llamas. Nomadic herders constantly drive their flocks through the Andes, in search of forage. Often they use stretches of the old camino real, the magnificent Inca highway that stretches for hundreds of miles down the Chilean side of the mountains, paved and drained in stretches, and sometimes hacked into the solid rock of cliffsides in long series of steps. That highway was built to consolidate the Inca conquest of Chile that preceded the white man's by a hundred years; today white archaeologists have identified only traces of it here and there; it is lost to our world but it still serves the world of the living Incas, who drive their herds, and hunt, and gather fuel in all the nooks and crannies of the towering ranges.

It is a culture—the one that now remains—that sees money only occasionally, using it once in a while to buy sheep and mules “outside,” to pay itinerant Turco peddlers for their wares and itinerant Christian priests for theirs. It is a culture in which the rituals and the superstitions of Christianity are superimposed in only a thin layer on the lasting remnants of a deep-rooted ancient sunworship mixed with animal wor-

ship. The Christian cross is in every village, and the Christian church, and the Christian priest when he gets around to it and decides to say a few masses and catch up with some back weddings and baptisms. But on the outskirts of every village, too, is the little shrine, often a mere pile of stones similar to those found in Tibet as places where the travelers can show their devotion. In Tibet the passing Mongolian adds his stone to the pile to show that he is thinking of spiritual matters; in the Andes things are not yet so formalized. There the offering is something that has real value—a few coca leaves laid down by arriving or departing men, in reverence to—the Virgin Mary? the sun? the memory of the ancient Incas?—in reverence to everything that matters.

Nobody who has seen and felt the almost miraculous power of the sun at those altitudes of from thirteen to sixteen thousand feet can fail to understand the power of the ancient sun worship over the minds and the souls of the Incas, and the power of its remnants over their modern descendants. When it shines, the weather is warm and invigorating; when it is hidden, the weather is grim and almost arctic. At the lake I once washed out a towel and hung it over a boulder to dry. The part that hung in the sun was dry and soft almost immediately; the part that hung in the shade was frozen solid.

Nor can anybody who has watched the lives of those Indians doubt the sincerity of their devotion, which is no less deep for all the remnants of their ancient paganism that are still mixed with their present Catholic faith, and no less real because here and there some unscrupulous Christian priest takes advantage of their abiding faith to his own enrichment.

I knew of a priest in one of the hidden nooks of Atacama who every spring had five gallons of sea water shipped up

from the Pacific port of Antofagasta. In his own village of Chiu Chiu he rebottled it in a large number of small vials. These he blessed, loaded on a pack mule, and peddled around to all the villages within fifty miles. He sold them to the Indians at fancy prices because their magic was sure to produce rain, to make the corn and the alfalfa plentiful. The Indians put the vials in their corrals, carefully guarded against all accidents. If rain came that year it had been brought by the priest's salt water; if it did not come, that was a sure sign somebody in the village had sinned.

It is a culture, that scattered remnant of the once-magnificent Inca empire, in which the llama is still the mainstay, as the camel is in many parts of the East, and the seal in the far North. Llamas provide meat and wool—and few women are ever without their spinning whorls, making thread for clothing. Often the llamas provide fuel through their droppings. They are the pack animals; mules can carry greater loads but they also eat more and would starve on the grazing that keeps the American cousins of the camel fat and healthy and nasty-tempered. But temper or no temper, nobody who has ever seen an Indian walking along with his herd of llamas, talking to this one, clucking at that, telling jokes to a third and laughing at him, can doubt that the llama is still regarded as a true friend of man—as a companion and an animal to be respected, and not just a beast of burden.

Anthropologists have speculated on that friendship between the Andean Indian and their llamas as perhaps giving a clue to the singular riddle: Why is it that man, in historic times, has not succeeded in domesticating a single wild animal—that all our domestic animals have been given to us by primitive men and were tamed many centuries before history began? Is it because primitive man, far from being ter-



rified by nature and all the so-called perils around him, actually felt identified with nature? Is it because he had less feeling than we of being *apart* from the animals, because he actually felt akin to them, because he could for that reason make friends with them and work out the relationship of domestication, not as a matter of taming through brute force and superior intelligence, but as a matter of mutual convenience, a kind of bilateral compact, in which man supplied food and shelter and the beasts did the heavy labor in return?

Certainly that speculation, well supported by the gentle friendliness of the Andean Indians toward their llamas, throws a possible new light on the character of primitive man. Perhaps he was not the ferocious brute we like to picture him. Even during my own long stay at the hunter's paradise of Laguna de San Francisco I had felt many of my old predatory impulses subsiding. Our relation with the vicuñas and the chinchillas was illuminating; I was identified with nature and felt no need to harm any other creature—except as we needed them for food.

We broke camp on February 12, Juan to return to Chile and Carlos and I to invade Argentina and attend to the simple business of becoming millionaires. I hated saying good-bye to Juan, who had been such a splendid companion. I recalled his soroche at Barrancas Blancas, and disliked seeing him start alone on the long trek back to Chile. But he assured me that he would be all right, and rode off happily with the three mules I had given him. He fully expected a letter from me from Buenos Aires, informing him that I had arranged for funds to operate the mine, and calling him back to the mountains, to go to work as a big boss over hundreds of imported laborers. Hundreds?—thousands!—well, anyway, millions of dollars however it was done.

Carlos and I started El Juez to jangling his bell along his placid course, and herded the rest of the sheep after him.

"Mula! Ande! Tsha-a-ah!" We were off on the trail again.

We had thirty-six sheep left and were anxious to get rid of them.

Carlos and I ambled on, dreaming magnificent dreams of Argentina's fleshpots, annoyed at the slow pace. About fifteen miles from the lake we could see a valley far from the trail, with the Indian village that Carlos had mentioned. Smoke was coming from the houses. We knew that the people there would be delighted to get our sheep, but they had the bad grace to live too far from the trail to suit our convenience. We kept on going, wishing sincerely that we felt like detouring to get rid of our sheep.

Suddenly we saw a woman run toward us, waving and shouting as she ran. Her white head glistened in the sun above the faded red of her bodice, and her numerous skirts, one over the other, waddled fantastically from side to side as she labored over the stony trail on bare feet. In her left hand she carried the ubiquitous spinning whorl, a small wooden disk with a stick through it, on which the thread was wound after being twirled. We stopped to wait for her.

"Señor," she said, panting, "do you have coca? We are out of coca. That is bad."

Carlos had coca leaves and gave her a handful. She held out a small coin in pay, but he waved it aside with a grin. Embarrassed she stood there and mumbled her thanks.

"Mamita," I said. "Do you want some sheep?"

She shifted from foot to foot and said that she had sheep.

"But you can use more. All these. Look at them—nice and fat. We have thirty-six of them here."

"Señor," she finally managed to stutter, "we have no

money. Life is hard up here. We have no money. Ay! what shall we do? What shall we do? Every time we have a little money the Turcos come and sell aguardiente to our men and cheat us out of our money. And then there has to be a fiesta and we have to pay the musicians, and buy wine, and firecrackers, and pay the priest. Ay, señor, what shall we do?" She seemed ready to cry.

I leaned forward over the pommel of my saddle, and smiled at her as reassuringly as I could.

"Es bien, señora, it is all right. I don't want money. You can have these sheep for nothing."

She collected herself and stared at me—a deep suspicion evident in her glance. Either I was mad or I was trying to slip some kind of shady deal over on her. But the offer had left her speechless and for a long moment she could only shift from foot to foot—her mouth open.

"It's all right, señora. Do you want them or don't you? We are in a hurry and want to get rid of our sheep. If you want them, take them away."

Still she was undecided. Then Carlos said a few reassuring words to her in Quechua. She stuffed a wad of coca leaves into her mouth and began to chew frantically. Somewhat irritated by now, I told her again to get a move on and drive the sheep away if she wanted them, and not keep us waiting all day.

Finally she was galvanized into action. She bustled around, heading the sheep off the trail and toward the village. She was so astonished that she forgot to thank us. Carlos and I watched her for a long time. Every few moments she stopped to turn around and stare at us suspiciously.

Carlos laughed. "I wonder what her man will say. What

would you think if you sent your wife to beg a few coca leaves and she came back with a herd of fat sheep?"

Again we arrived in Fiambala, and rode straight to Don Julio's hacienda. The genial rancher received us with open arms and numberless questions.

"Where have you been? Where is Juan? Was your enterprise successful? Do you want more sheep? I have a lot ready for you but you had better wait till spring. It is nearly winter now and the going will soon be dangerous."

"Wait, Don Julio, wait. Let me get my breath. Allow me to take a bath and change into something clean. I will tell you a story. It is a very fine story, but I am out of the sheep business."

"Of course, of course. Pardon my impatience. Here is your house. Doña Maria! Maria! Come out, woman, and make our guests comfortable!"

Later, bathed, shaved, refreshed, and comfortably seated, I told the story of our roamings to Don Julio and his family. They sat wide-eyed, exclaiming over every incident.

"Ay, que terrible, que terrible."

Don Julio looked grave when I told about the storm at Barrancas Blancas and the perilous passage of the shelf trail. "You were in great danger," he said. "Many a man has been caught by the snows up there and has never come out alive. Only last year two men left here in autumn, about this time of year, to seek work in the Chilean mines. They never arrived there and they were never heard from again."

"Was one of them dark, señor? Was one an Indian?"

"Yes, one was an Indian."

"Then I think I can tell you what happened to them."

I told Don Julio about the cadaver we had found, and the indications of cannibalism. The women shuddered in horror.

"Que terrible, que terrible. He ate him. Ay, los pobres—the poor fellows."

Gravely Don Julio asked me to report the matter to the police, to clear up a mystery that had been tearing the town for many months.

Señora de Quiroz had met us with maté on our arrival and we sucked it contentedly as we talked. Serving maté is an old Argentine custom. Guests are greeted with it, awakened with it in the morning, served it twice in the course of the day, and sent to bed with it at night.

It is a herb grown in Argentina, Paraguay and Uruguay. It is put in a silver utensil which looks like a small loving cup. A lump of sugar is placed in the cup and boiling water is poured onto the sugar and the maté leaves. Then a silver tube, called a bombilla, is inserted and the hot maté tea is sucked up. Before one gets accustomed to it, he usually burns his mouth. The hostess takes the first cupful. Then more sugar and hot water are added, and it is passed to the guest, then to all the members of the family. A servant stands by to pass it around. It goes to each person three or four times at a sitting. Everyone uses the same bombilla.

Among all my tales, I believe the account of our stay at Lake San Francisco did most to horrify the kindly and maternal Señora de Quiroz.

"Imagine it," she said again and again. "You poor men. All those months without a Christian roof over your heads. Out there in the wilderness without a sign of civilization. Ay, los pobres, los pobres! Why didn't you come here and let us take care of you?"

There was no use trying to tell her that those months at the lake had been among the most enjoyable of my life. She *would* have it that I was only trying to put a good face on

the matter and began to look on me almost in awe, as on some kind of hero who bore the greatest terrors and hardships unflinchingly and with a brave smile.

Don Julio was still interested in my saddle mule. "I see you brought her back," he said. "Fatter and sleeker than ever." But then he checked himself. Always the trader, he knew well the danger of praising the other man's goods. "She seemed to limp just a little when you came in," he added hastily. "I hope she hasn't pulled a tendon."

"Señor, she is fitter than she ever was. There isn't a thing wrong with her. She is the finest mule I have ever seen."

"What are you going to do with her now? You can't take her to Buenos Aires with you."

"I plan to sell her."

Don Julio, who had known all along that that was the way it stood, rubbed his hands with joy.

"You see," he said, "if you had left her here the last time, you wouldn't have had to bring her back now. I have always found that the man who has patience usually gets what he wants. I knew I'd get that mule."

"Whoa, señor. Not so fast. I am not even sure I'll sell her to you."

"Not to me?" He stood with his mouth open, contemplating the awful thought.

"I am not selling her alone. I have eleven mules and a bell mare here, as well as packsaddles and riding saddles. Whoever makes me the best offer for everything gets the roan along with the rest."

He nodded, smiling cheerfully again. "That's all right," he said. "We'll look them over tomorrow and agree on a price."

But tomorrow stretched out day after day, since Don

Julio was busy and Carlos and I enjoyed the delightful hospitality of his home. Finally the end came—embarrassingly—through Carlos's bad behavior.

I had taught him the need for keeping himself clean and of shaving. Nevertheless, he swaggered around disreputably. He had no clothes appropriate for civilization and he usually had a ball of coca the size of an egg in his mouth. He had never before been in a city larger than Copiapó, and there he had never lived with the gente decente, as the upper classes were called. In Fiambala he was the hero of the town, with his fast-growing stories of our adventures in the mountains, and every day he swaggered more.

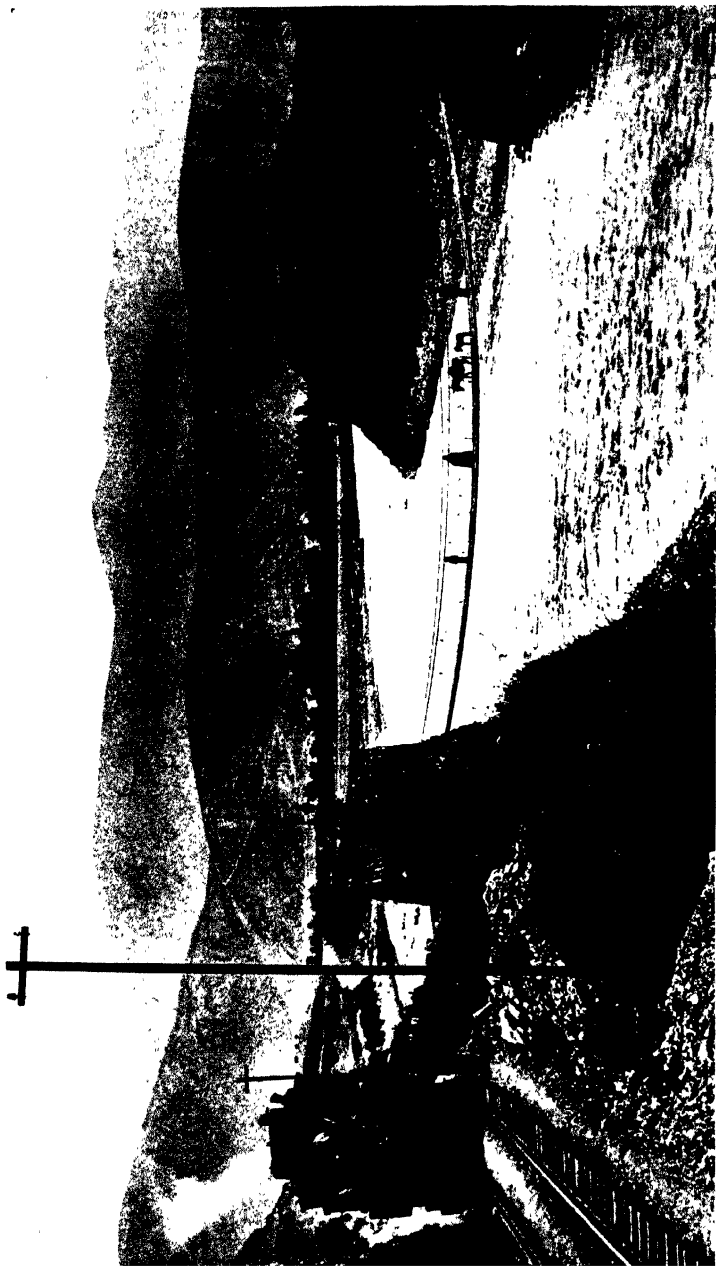
But it was not his clothing or his swaggering that caused the real trouble, though those, I could see, caused the de Quiroz family considerable embarrassment. He had a propensity for falling in love with every woman he saw. It was his firm belief that none could resist him. He rolled his eyes and fawned sickeningly at every young woman who passed, and when women were present he could not help strutting as if he were the most fascinating devil in the world.

At Dón Julio's he tried to make love to a seventeen-year-old servant girl. For a while he stood around grinning at her and ogling her from head to foot. Finally, when he mistakenly thought she was ready for it, he made some pretty definite and ardent advances. The girl repulsed him and ran weeping to the señora to tell her what had happened.

Don Julio came to me about it. He was quite formal and, I could see, indignant. I assured him I would take Carlos to task for his lack of respect in the house of his host. I got Carlos in a corner and gave him a lecture. He listened courteously, but I could tell by the merry sparkle in his eyes that he was not impressed.







Sights like this are commonplace in Peru. Here one of Peru's most modern trains stops beside a chain cable suspension bridge, relic of old Spanish days. The river is the Manitaro, at Paccha.

The following day Don Julio, still somewhat grim-lipped, was quite ready to conclude his business with me. He was most generous, not for an instant trying to drive a bargain. He paid me twenty-seven hundred dollars for my entire stock of animals and equipment, which was over three times what they had cost me at the conclusion of the Portorillos pipeline job.

Gratefully, Carlos and I bade him good-bye.

By car we went to the railhead at Tinogasta; by train to Córdoba. Córdoba, Buenos Aires, Santiago, Lima, Quito. We were part of the world again, part of the world of men and women, civilization, hotels, hot baths, champagne, lotteries and dinner clothes. But still there were adventures ahead, greater and darker adventures in mountains and on jungle trails. There is still adventure to be found in South America if you know where.

## Chapter V

GETTING Carlos properly dressed for civilization was a major problem in restraint. He went wild in the shops of Córdoba, and would have emerged like a scrambled rainbow—yellow shoes, sky-blue suit, purple shirt, and lavender necktie—if I hadn't put the brakes on and told him that he couldn't go with me unless he gave me a controlling voice in the matter of clothing.

Dressed for the part, however, he began to play the gentleman in no uncertain terms. It was in restaurants that he showed his full genius. Unable to read a word, he nevertheless never failed to study the menu carefully, often holding it upside down, keeping the waiter standing by his side, pursing his lips, and going carefully over every item. Finally he would say to the waiter:

"You don't seem to have much of a selection today. Have you anything special to suggest?"

Then, invariably, he took the waiter's suggestion.

Civilization made such a deep impression on him that he began to forget his old bucolic dreams for a ranch.

"When we sell the mine," he said to me once, "let us get a house here in Córdoba—a fine big house, with lots of servants, and an automobile."

"Not so fast, Carlos, not so fast," I answered. "I doubt if we can sell it outright. Anyway, we'll get more out of it in the long run if we keep a controlling interest and go there first to build it up and run it."

"Go back there, patrón? Go back there? But we would have to live like savages again for a long time."

But then he'd think it over and his entrepreneur instincts would get the better of him.

"When are you going to sell the mine? Why not do it now? There are lots of rich men here in Córdoba. Look at them—they have servants and automobiles and fine houses. They ought to be glad to get a mine."

I assured him that it would be best to wait until we reached Buenos Aires. But that meant nothing to him. Córdoba was the grandest city he had ever seen, he could imagine nothing bigger, or finer, or wealthier, and at times he suspected me of soldiering on the job by not going ahead then and there to raise a million dollars overnight.

Córdoba is a lovely, rolling city, located in high hills, and colorful in comparison with the monotony of the flat Argentine pampa cities. It is a summer resort. In the surrounding country are a number of summer hotels. The people of Córdoba, however, live in constant fear. Their water supply comes from a great dam above them, and the idea has gained a foothold that the dam will burst someday. Many of the more cautious have moved their homes to the uplands, out of danger.

After months in the wilderness, Carlos and I reveled in the sights and sounds of a civilized city. We loafed in the beautiful park, and at the sidewalk tables of the cafés. We toured the shops, the gambling houses, and the restricted districts. The latter was a wild and degraded reminder of the old Barbary Coast, and of the red-light districts in the United States of thirty years ago. A glance at the many women there, often penned up like dogs in a kennel, showed dead,

soulless eyes, so lifeless that it was a wonder they continued living.

Córdoba, and Rosario, and then Buenos Aires, with money in our pockets and the world open ahead.

But the money began to go. Our first hotel, on the Calle Florida, cost us thirty dollars a day, and even I could see that it wouldn't do for the long pull. An Englishman at the British Bar told me about a comfortable and inexpensive English family hotel in a suburb. Carlos and I lost no time in moving there—and moving right out again. After three days both of us were asked in no uncertain terms to get out. Again Carlos had made love to the wrong maid.

I was angry and embarrassed, and even Carlos was a bit sheepish this time. We moved to a German family hotel in the same suburb, and remained there the rest of our stay in Buenos Aires.

There began a long and discouraging round of peddling our mine, which didn't seem nearly so miraculously wealthy from a distance of many hundreds of miles, and under the skeptical comments of potential buyers, as it had up there in the wild Andean ranges. I met many wealthy and influential Argentineans. Invariably they received me with the greatest courtesy, and listened with grave interest to my beautiful tale of untold riches hidden away where few had ever penetrated before. They admired my samples, and pursed their lips and whistled with joy over the assay report. Enthusiastically they helped me build the road to the mine and the smelter, and the living quarters. With enraptured patriotism they extolled the riches of their country. But it was just as it had been in Chile:

"Let me congratulate you, señor. The wealth of this country! The richness! Immense, I tell you! You have a splendid

thing there. Oh, yes, Argentina is going to be a mighty nation. One of the greatest. The wealth! The riches! Nothing is lacking but the capital, and you North Americans have to furnish that."

So it went in office after office, in club after club, in bar after bar—where I met many of my prospects in order to talk business in decent, civilized, and pleasant surroundings while having a little sip for the sake of good-fellowship. There was no lack of good-fellowship, but an astonishing lack of capital.

"Capital?" one man exclaimed in surprise after I had finally managed to get around to that embarrassing word which he had so studiously tried to avoid. "Capital? I? Señor, you honor me. You flatter me beyond bounds. I am a poor man. Soy hombre bien pobre. You North Americans are the ones who have capital for that kind of thing. I can see very well that you have something immense in your mine, something enormous, something that cannot fail to make you a millionaire. Let me congratulate you. But New York is the place for the capital."

We "North" Americans. I learned early that it didn't do to call myself an American. We were all Americans, and the Yanquis were all too prone to hog the term. Here and there, too, amid the effusive protests of envy, and the fine, courteous receptions that were given me everywhere, I could feel the slightest edge of resentment. "You North Americans are the ones who have the capital," with just a touch of irony and bitterness, and with a thinly veiled pleasure in referring me back to New York, the world capital of Yanqui imperialism. But perhaps I was mistaken. Sometimes one gets that feeling in Latin America without having it conveyed in so

many words, without being able, definitely, to put one's finger on its source.

One or two men wanted to put me onto others who might finance my venture, but first they wanted agreements with me under which they would acquire disproportionate shares in the mine. Those, however, were rare. Most of them just listened with the utmost politeness and then dismissed me with infinite finesse and courtesy, always describing themselves as having been honored by my visit.

All this time Carlos was spending money like a drunken sailor, sublimely trustful that I would manage the deal and put us on Easy Street before many weeks were gone. In his mind the mine kept growing in size and richness, exactly as it kept shrinking in mine.

Time, however, passed pleasantly, together with the money. Some new acquaintances, charming Englishmen, invited me to visit a hacienda in southern Argentina, near Lake Nahuel Huapi. Carlos went along as my servant. It was the Argentine estate of an English nobleman who spent three months of the year on the ranch, and the rest of his time in London.

It was a cattle and sheep ranch. Every animal was pure-bred, from sires imported from England. The cattle were Aberdeen Angus and the sheep Rambouillet. The horses were sons of a pure bred Arabian stallion, the most magnificent animal I have ever seen. He had been given to the owner by Lord Willoughby, once governor general in Arabia.

Every afternoon we coursed for hares, which were so numerous that they destroyed crops and vegetables and flower gardens. With the greyhounds we killed fifteen or

twenty hares a day, which were fed to the dogs. It was exciting and dangerous riding, for the ground was full of holes.

I heard a strange story at the ranch. There was a lake there, about a mile and a half long. Natives living near its shores said there was a great serpent in its depths. They claimed it was a terrifying sight, more than three hundred feet long, with horns, and ferocious eyes.

One woman told me she had fired at it with a rifle. A father and son said that it had once come up only a few feet from them when they were in a boat. I heard numerous accounts from people who claimed to have seen the beast. What impressed me was that the description was always just about the same.

That was the first time I heard the prehistoric-monster story in South America. It was not the last. Years later I heard it again from Indians and native Brazilians who lived along the Tocantins River and told of a great water snake that many had seen there. In all the essentials, the description of that Tocantins monster tallied with that of the beast on Sir Henry's ranch.

Even the captain of my motor launch on the Tocantins told me about the serpent. One night, as he was passing the hole where the Indians and the Brazilian settlers claimed to have seen the monster, his boat came to an abrupt stop as though it had struck a sandbank. The captain said that while he stood riveted to the deck in amazement—it was the deepest part of the river—his little ship was suddenly lifted several feet out of the water. Naturally the passengers were in a panic, but the dripping keel dropped back into the river as suddenly as it had been lifted out, and then the boat proceeded on its journey.

It sounds fantastic to write it up here; it doesn't sound



fantastic in South America. Especially in the jungles of the Amazon Basin, where my adventurous journeys were eventually to lead me. Nothing is too fantastic to be believed when one is in the heart of that great continent, and nothing there is too fantastic to be true. A number of serious scientific expeditions have gone out in search of the dinosaurs and other long-dead beasts that had been reported on apparently reputable authority as still disporting themselves in Patagonia, in the Madre de Dios region, in the Mount Roraima region of the Guianas. And why not? Only a few years ago fishermen off the coast of Africa hauled to the surface a living specimen of a prehistoric precursor of our modern fish, one that had been "known" to be extinct these many geological ages.

Skeptics sneer at those things. But like many another man who has had his nose rubbed into the strange marvels of South America, I have lost the capacity for sneering at them. Too well do I know the feeling with which so many South Americans come forth with their favorite remark:

"Quién sabe?" Who knows? Nothing is impossible in that strange country. Had anybody tried to predict the bizarre adventures that were in store for me in the Amazonian jungles I would have roared with laughter.

Back in Buenos Aires after the delightful interlude at the ranch, the problem of money became acute. Efforts to sell our silver-lead property became more or less desultory, and worry over the problem of what to do next took uppermost place in my mind.

It was Carlos, who had no inkling of the value of money—especially my money—who finally did something that spurred me to action. I sent him to the drugstore one evening to change fifty pesos—or about twenty dollars. I waited

for him until midnight and then I went to bed. About three in the morning he came in to waken me and the guilty look on his face made me fear the worst for my money.

"Out with it," I said sternly.

"Patrón, it was this way," he began, and then paused in evident embarrassment. He twisted his knuckles a moment and then looked at me with a halfhearted grin. "Patrón, you have more money, haven't you?"

"Very little more. Damn it! What did you do with my fifty pesos—lose them?"

"Well, yes, patrón. I'm afraid I did," he admitted reluctantly. "But I didn't exactly lose them. I saw a girl ——"

"Oho, so that was it." Mentally I was already wondering how I could get rid of the fellow and where I could get a job.

"No, it's not what you think. I gave it to her out of the goodness of my heart. I mean I lent it to her. Patrón, she was weeping. You don't know how she was weeping. It tears a man's heart to hear a poor girl weep like that. A man has feelings, patrón. A man has sentiment. La pobre—weeping so pitifully, she ——"

He was working himself into an orgiastic exhibition of sentimentality, almost getting ready to weep himself at the thought of that poor girl. "Stop it, Carlos. Stop it. You'll have me crying too in a minute. I have feelings. I have sentiment. I have feelings for my fifty pesos. You don't know how tragic I feel about them. Out with it, fellow. What did you do with them?"

He looked at me, hurt and accusing, as though we Yanqui imperialists could think of nothing but money. Then he went on, slowly, as though it pained him.

"Well, it was this way. She said she had been sent by her sick mother to buy medicine, and she had lost the money.

Patrón, you don't know how bad it made me feel. The poor girl—and her mother sick at home. I told her I was going to the drugstore to change fifty pesos. She asked if I would let her buy the medicine with my—your—money, and then I could go home with her and she would give me back what she had spent. I guess, patrón—” he hung his head, mumbling “—I did wrong. I waited outside the store till two o'clock. She must have gone out through another door. I couldn't find her anywhere.”

That was the straw that broke the camel's back. I had to have money and I had to get rid of Carlos. The mining proposition was no good, and we were nearing rock bottom. The next day I went to the British Society, looking for a job of some kind. They arranged one for me, as a section engineer on the Central Córdoba Railroad. I was to go to work in a week or so, and I decided to use my first salary check for sending Carlos back to Chile.

But then, just a few days before I was to start on the job, our luck changed in an unexpected manner that still leaves me dizzy when I think of it.

I had acquired the South American habit of spending hours over a five-cent cup of coffee. On one cold, raw and rainy day we were sipping our coffee in a confitería, or chocolate shop, listening to music from a three-piece ensemble in the rear of the shop.

At five-thirty every afternoon it was customary to write on the mirror back of the counter the winning lottery numbers. Even on my rapidly declining funds I had bought lottery tickets almost every day, in accordance with the national custom. Idly I sat and watched while the attendant chalked up the winners, thinking more about my job than

about the numbers that went up there on the mirror before my eyes.

Then, suddenly, I saw it. A number that looked familiar. It was the winner of one hundred thousand pesos, or about forty-three thousand dollars, on the Tucumán drawing. Forty-three thousand dollars! I was certain that I had the ticket in my pocket, but I was afraid to look. For one thing I feared disappointment; for another I feared pickpockets in case my ticket *should* turn out to be the winning one.

I stared at the figures dumbly, trying to figure out what to do. The ticket was burning a hole in my pocket. Finally I stumbled to the men's room, took out my ticket, and read off the figures one by one. There could be no mistake about it. Forty-three thousand dollars and I had the winning number. There must be some catch in it, but there it was, digit by digit, just as it was written on the mirror. My mind was in a whirl.

I went back to the table, called the waiter, and ordered another cup of coffee. Carlos stared at me.

"Are you sick, patrón? You're pale as a ghost."

"I do feel a bit nauseated," I admitted. "We'll have this coffee and then we'll take a taxi home."

"A taxi?" in surprise. "You told me you had only twenty pesos till payday. A taxi'll cost five pesos."

"We'll take one anyway," I said briefly. I didn't dare tell Carlos that I had won the lottery for fear he'd talk too much. I didn't dare even walk home, for fear of being robbed on the way. I wanted nothing but to get back to the hotel as well and as safe as possible, and then, somehow, to last out the night until business could be accomplished the following day.

The next morning I hurried to an English bank. I waited anxiously while they sent my ticket to a lottery agency to

collect the money. Finally the teller informed me that the money had been collected.

Forty-three thousand dollars. We were in funds again. We were through with Buenos Aires. We were going to Santiago, Chile. We were going to Lima, to Quito. We were going to see all of South America. Carlos could stay with me. I had a valet again.

I rushed home in a taxi, eager to tell Carlos about our good fortune. He wasn't there.

For months I had been irritated because he was constantly underfoot, and now I missed him. I was bursting with my good news, and he wasn't there to listen. I packed, had lunch, paid my bill, and prepared to leave for Chile. Still no Carlos.

I was getting ready to leave money for him with the clerk, with instructions to meet me in Santiago, when he walked in, beaming.

"Carlos, damn it, where have you been? I almost left without you."

He looked at the packed bags in surprise.

"Patrón," he said, "I went to a funeral."

"A funeral? Whose funeral?"

"I don't know whose it was. I never heard of him. But a man told me they pay mourners two and a half dollars to ride in a procession at an Italian funeral, so I went to an undertaker he had told me about. There was a funeral today and it was easy. The undertaker gave me a dark suit to wear, and all I had to do was ride in a car and look sad."

Touched, I was ready to forgive Carlos everything. At the last moment he had come through, had tried his best to earn a bit of money and help out with our depleted finances.

"Two and a half dollars," he said slowly. "Patrón, it is difficult to look sad when one earns two and a half dollars so easily."

"Yes, I know, Carlos. I know. But get your things ready. We're going to Chile."

"To Chile?" He stared at me, his mouth open. All that afternoon, and on all that long ride on the trans-Andean railroad to Santiago, he kept asking question after question about the lottery prize. No matter how often I told him, he kept coming back for the story again and again. He didn't quite believe it. Somewhere in the back of his mind there lurked the suspicion that I had sold the mine.

It took me many weeks to convince him. But what did it matter? We had money again and the goodhearted Carlos had no thought of leaving me.

The lode is still there. Someday I am going back with capital to work it. Someday! Every Yanqui who has been in South America for any length of time has a "someday" of that sort tucked away in the back of his head. Usually there is a mine or a treasure lurking behind it. But that may be pure rationalization. "Someday I am going back." That's what South America does to a man.

## Chapter VI

HIS name was Arturo Mendez and I met him under the waving palms of Lima's delightful Zoological Garden Restaurant. He was an Ecuadorean, introduced to me by an old Peruvian friend from European days. He was one of the best talkers I have ever heard; it was a pleasure to sit with him and hear him discourse about the history of South America's West Coast.

I remember the time when an Indian came up, peddling a batch of poor, crude pottery, made in shoddy imitation of the magnificent sculptured urns that have made ancient Peru famous to collectors and archaeologists.

"It is pathetic, señor," he said. "Pathetic. They call them huacos. You have seen the real huacos? The clay pots from the Chan Chan period? Yes, I knew you had seen them. You have seen them in pictures and in museums. Señor, never in history has a people developed the art of modeling to such an extent as the ancients did in their huacos. 'Whistle-jars,' I believe the archaeologists call them. Such characterization, such caricatures. Lean men with long noses, complacent fat men who fold their hands over their bellies, honest men with twinkles in their eyes, unscrupulous politicians. I tell you, señor, if an artist today modeled the men he sees about him here, with the same skill and grace that those ancients of many centuries ago showed in the modeling of *their* people, he would not only be world famous and rich, but many of his figures would look exactly like those on the old huacos."

I had been trying to obtain some of the old whistle-jars to take home with me. Carlos and I had been snooping a bit in the back country, trying to find a burial ground where we might dig up a few to take back to the United States. I told it to Señor Mendez. He laughed.

"This is not the place for it. This is not where they are found. North of here, near Trujillo. That is where the real huacos come from. But be careful. You know, don't you, that there is a Peruvian law against their exportation? Those priceless old things belong to this country and the Peruvians have finally decreed against their being taken out."

I thought I had my genial friend on two counts, and I told him so.

"Let me tell you about a man I met last week," I said. "He was an American. He came down here on a Grace steamer and he stayed here only a few weeks. But he was lucky. Somehow he fell in with an Indian who took him to a place only twenty or so miles from here, where there was an ancient burial ground. Listen, señor, they dug there one afternoon and they found four magnificent huacos. I didn't see them but my friend told me about them. He was going to sell them to the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York. And I know he had no trouble getting them out of Peru."

Señor Mendez and my Peruvian friend both laughed uproariously.

"That is good, amigo. That is excellent. Let me tell you something. When an Indian comes up to you here, and offers to show you a cemetery where you can dig up old huacos, you just laugh at him. It is a swindle of the first water. There are a dozen Indians in this vicinity who work for the Ger-



mans and the Japanese to swindle Yanqui tourists. Didn't you know that?"

I was interested and wanted to know more. Señor Mendez suddenly had a grave look on his face.

"It is a shame, señor, that things should be like that. Honorable men don't swindle others. But there are dishonorable men everywhere and we have them down here too. Here is the way this particular swindle works. Some years ago somebody smuggled out some real huacos from the Trujillo region, and sent them to Germany and Japan to be reproduced by factory methods. The reproductions are not bad, either; not bad at all. They would fool almost any layman at first glance—until he compared them with the real thing.

"Hundreds of those copies were shipped back to Peru and were buried in ancient cemeteries. Trujillo is too far away. Lima is where the tourists come, so the vicinity of Lima suddenly acquired a peppering of old Chan Chan pottery. Then the swindlers hired Indians to 'discover' those things.

"You see how it works, don't you? Some tourist, some innocent, is walking around in Lima, looking for local color. An Indian comes up, acting very secretive. He says he knows where some of this priceless pottery can be found, and he can guide the tourist there for a high fee. The pay must be high because the Indian is taking a big risk, what with the laws and everything. So the tourist goes out, sometimes in the dead of night, and he actually sees the Indian digging the pots out of the ground. And then comes the very expensive business of smuggling them out of the country. The Indian knows a boatman in Callao harbor, who can take them to the steamer and who knows somebody on the steamer to hide the stuff until the Peruvian government officials have departed.





"All this, mind you, with great secrecy, at great risk, and high cost. If you could buy one of those German or Japanese huacos in the open market, you might get it for a dollar. Certainly the Peruvian government would have no objection to your taking that trash out of the country. But I don't know. It is a shameful business but I am not sure that the tourists are really cheated. Tourists pay for thrills and it is when they don't get them that they feel abused. Not for anything would I myself engage in anything so dishonorable, but I am not sure that the men who do engage in it don't give the travelers exactly what the latter want."

I took a great fancy to my new Ecuadorean friend, and I saw a good deal of him in the course of several weeks. Somehow he and I fell into the habit of meeting two or three afternoons a week at the Lima Casino in the Zoological Garden, and always he talked well and fluently, with an almost inexhaustible fund of information.

He came from one of the oldest colonial families.

"One of my ancestors," he said, "was an officer with Gonzalo Pizarro when the latter was viceroy in Quito. A Mendez went with Pizarro on the famous expedition to the Oriente, in search of gold and the cinnamon forests, the time, you know, when Orellana left the main expedition to descend the Napo River in search of food, and came out months later on the Atlantic Ocean—having meanwhile discovered the Amazon River and traversed its entire length.

"A Mendez has always been along, whenever the history of Ecuador was made. The history of our country is the history of our family. Someday, señor, I hope to have the honor of showing you my house in Quito, of having you as a guest there. I would like to show you the relics of the past that have come down to the present—some of them still

veiled in deep mystery. There are things, señor—I have one or two of them with me here and will show them to you if you like—there are things still in existence today, remnants of the old empire of the Incas, that nobody can explain. There are mysteries ——”

I had been reading Prescott's *Conquest of Peru*, but, coming from Mendez's lips, here in the city that had been founded by the conquistadores, the story of the conquest seemed to take on an entirely new meaning and color.

“Imagine that swineherd Pizarro, uneducated, illiterate, coming down here from Panama to conquer the great Inca empire. I tell you, señor, that is a story of Spanish heroism that has never been equalled in the history of the world. Pizarro and Almagro and a hundred men—a hundred men against the marvellous military organization of the Incas. And they did it; they conquered it. Cut off from retreat, cut off from everything, they conquered Peru and built this city of Lima.”

“It must have been a wonderful empire,” I said, more for want of anything else to say than in an effort to add to the conversation.

“Wonderful? Magnificent! Staggering! The wealth, the gold, the culture—crude and savage you understand, but a culture nevertheless. And the gold—never in history was a people so rich in gold. That room in Cajamarca. Have you been in Cajamarca, señor?”

“No.”

“You must go there. They tell me the room is still there, the one the Inca Atahualpa filled with treasure for his ransom. Seventeen feet wide by twenty-two feet long, filled with gold nine feet deep. That was the price set for the liberation of the captured Inca. Atahualpa sent out to all

parts of the land, and people came from everywhere, bringing gold.

"But Pizarro didn't get it all. He killed the Inca before the room was entirely full. All he got was about fifteen million dollars in gold. And there was millions and millions more of it on the way to Cajamarca when the news went out that the Inca was dead, and all that gold was never delivered. Never. Perhaps another fifteen millions. Pizarro knew it was on the way, and then he knew it had disappeared. Disappeared—without a trace. Gone back into the earth somewhere. Men have been looking for that treasure ever since, and nobody has found it. Indians by the hundreds have been tortured through these centuries, but not one has ever told where it was.

"Except here and there. A hint here and a hint there. And a few people know the secrets still."

"There have been expeditions to search for that gold," I ventured.

He almost snorted. "Expeditions? Of course there have been expeditions. Wild goose chases. What did they know about those things? I tell you, there are secrets—there are some in my family. Family traditions you know—when a family has been here as long as mine—there are things that are handed down."

He acted as though he was aching to tell me a few of those things, but I didn't press him.

"It's odd, isn't it," I said, "that they never found the mines where the Incas got their gold? All these hundreds of years of prospecting and mining, and no trace has been found of the source of those ancient treasures."

He looked at me as if in astonishment. "But, señor, that isn't true. Let me tell you something. If you go north from

here to Cajamarca, where the last of the Incas met his death, you can hire mules and ride a week inland to the town of Chachapoyas. You will be riding most of the way over an old paved Inca highway, with fortresses built along it. And in Chachapoyas almost anybody can tell you how to get to the old Inca mines. They are there, with stone hammers and stone mortars and pestles still in them."

The look on my face must have indicated my disbelief. Unperturbed he went on:

"It is just that you must not look for some phenomenally wealthy mine just because it was a phenomenally great treasure. That Chachapoyas mine has gold in it, but it doesn't pay to work it under modern conditions. It paid in those days. Even today hundreds of men wash gold out of the rivers in those regions. It is poor work that gets them perhaps fifty cents to a dollar a day. But was it such poor work then? *Quién sabe?* Who knows how many thousands of men worked for how many centuries, washing gold out of poor rivers, digging it out of numberless poor mines, little and big, to produce that great Inca treasure? That is the secret of the supposed 'lost' mines of the Incas."

Mendez's words interested me. I asked him more about Chachapoyas.

"It was one of the great strongholds of the Inca empire," he said. "That magnificent highway going through there, with the ancient fortresses along it—and then the ruined cities, all overgrown with jungle vegetation ——"

"Ruined cities?"

"Certainly, señor. You know the one that some of you North Americans discovered in Peru some years ago? Machu Picchu it was called. 'Discovered' is hardly the word for it. Someday an archaeologist will go to Chachapoyas, and

he will say to the first man in the street 'Where are the ruined cities?' And then he will be taken to two or three, as great as Machu Picchu, fortified towns, lying there now, covered with dirt and jungle lianas. And he will come back and be a great discoverer."

By this time I was, of course, thoroughly fascinated. Even as my friend talked, plans for a new expedition were beginning to form in my mind.

"Why not go there?" I said excitedly. "Would you go along, señor? Why not make an expedition together to find the mines and some of those cities?"

He smiled. "You honor me," he said. "I wish I could join you. But I have other matters to tend to. To tell you the truth, I am here in Lima to finance an expedition of my own. There are better things than that Chachapoyas project. This plan of mine—señor, you must be very discreet about this—you must say nothing about it to anybody—this plan of mine is something that I started once before. It is something that grew out of the Mendez fortunes. The Inca gold mines are all right, but they are poor. But the Inca treasures, there, señor ——"

"The Inca treasures!"

"I beg you, amigo, don't say it so loud. There are people here, dishonorable people, who would be glad to steal everything. You don't know how careful I have to be."

"But what in the world are you driving at?"

He assumed an air of great secrecy. "Let us meet tomorrow," he said. "Here, at this same table. I will show you something then that will interest you. But I must trust to your discretion."

Profoundly interested, but nevertheless torn by a certain amount of skepticism, I waited for Mendez the following



day. He came, looked around furtively, and then drew from his pocket a folder from which he extracted a square of some kind of skin that looked like vellum. He spread it out on the table.

"This is a map which came into the possession of my family over seventy-five years ago," he explained slowly. "It was discovered only recently after the death of my grandfather. It was given to him by a Jesuit priest."

I studied the map. It was a crude affair. The ink was badly faded, but I could make out a spot marked Quito, crosses which apparently indicated mountains, a spot marked Baños, and from there a line which might have been a route, and an arrow which pointed to the north.

"What is it?" I said.

"It shows the route from Quito to the place where the Incas hid the gold that Pizarro didn't get. Millions of pounds sterling, hidden away after Atahualpa was killed. This map shows how to get there."

There was nothing on the old map to show its purpose, and now Mendez seemed to be stretching things a bit thin.

"How do you know?" I asked.

"The priest told my grandfather."

"But," I objected, "it would be impossible to locate the line on this map. It is not tied to any known point."

"Part of the old trail exists today. The trail I found was easy to identify."

I looked at him with increasing interest. "Then you have been there?"

"Sí, señor. All the way. We reached the lake. It was artificial without a doubt. I saw a rampart at one end that did not seem at all natural." He indicated the lake on the map.

"Then why didn't you get the gold?" I asked him suspiciously.

"Our food was exhausted, and we had no means of destroying the bulkhead," he explained reasonably. "So I had to return. I was coming to Peru on business, and I brought this map along. I hoped to find capital here to finance an expedition, and there are one or two men in Lima who are very much interested. I haven't any idea what will come of it, but if I can raise enough money to go back to the lake, equipped to drain it, I know I can find the famous missing Inca treasure."

He seemed to be telling a straightforward, unrehearsed story, and I must admit that I was greatly intrigued. This was the kind of adventurous quest that interested me, and I wanted more than anything to have him let me in on the matter. Besides, I had grown to like Señor Mendez. He was clean-cut, fine-looking, about thirty-five. His complexion indicated at least a quarter Indian blood. His manner was at all times that of a perfect gentleman.

"What makes you think the gold is in Ecuador?" I went on. "And why couldn't you raise money for your expedition in your own country?"

"Señor, you don't know my people. It seems to be our nature to be jealous and suspicious of each other. The capitalists of my country wouldn't spend a sucre on the venture, even after I'd proved the authenticity of the map and the feasibility of the whole scheme. It's just that they wouldn't trust me any more than I'd trust them.

"But the gold is there, all right. Everything points to it. First, Atahualpa had a son who was viceroy where Quito now stands. Naturally they would have sent the treasure to the son on the father's death.

"Then there's the story of an old Spanish governor, which is a recognized part of our history. This was an old count, a profligate gambler and wastrel, whom the King of Spain sent out to govern Ecuador in the early colonial days. His salary was not enough to cover his extravagances. But there was an old Indian who had been an intimate friend of the Inca's viceroy in pre-Spanish days. He was fascinated by the Spaniard's princely manner, and became his devoted slave. Every time the count's funds were low, the Indian disappeared and came back some time later with a pot of gold."

Mendez's eyes glistened as he talked, and I could feel myself beginning to be caught by the gold fever.

"Naturally," Mendez continued, "these trips soon became necessary at shorter and shorter intervals, as the count discovered that all he had to do to get money was to spend all he had. It was an idyllic situation, but unfortunately for the count he was recalled to Madrid all too soon. Just before he left he persuaded the Indian to make one more trip, to bring back all the gold he could carry.

"The story got out, somehow. The Jesuits got hold of the old Indian and subjected him to a terrible torture to make him disclose the location of the treasure. But they couldn't get a word out of him. He died without giving the secret away."

Mendez leaned back, smoking, and looking at me as if for comment.

I thought a long while. "You say you have some people interested in the matter here in Peru?" I asked.

"Sí, señor. There are men here who at least say they are interested. I have been dealing with them all these weeks."

"Are you tied up with them? Have you a contract?"

"Not yet. You know how businessmen are. They drag

things out, and drag them out. And suspicion isn't confined solely to my country. There are some things about my dealings here that I don't like. I am an honorable man and I like to deal with honorable men. I like people with whom I can talk in a straightforward manner. Business—ugh-h-h." The man actually shuddered.

"Why do you tell me all this?" I suddenly shot at him. "Do you want me to finance you?"

His face broke into a smile. "Señor, I will tell you. I hadn't a thought at first of asking you into this. You were a pleasant café acquaintance who developed into a very great and esteemed amigo. But what business was all this of yours? Then you honored me by showing such a deep and intelligent interest in my country. And then came our conversation about Chachapoyas, and suddenly you wanted to go and hunt the Inca mines.

"Señor, I confess, all that made me think deeply. I thought that if only you and I could go on a gentlemen's agreement, just the two of us, with no businessmen to bother us and no strings to the expedition, just two friends doing this together—I thought how ideal it would all be. That is the way to do it—two honorable men sharing their fortunes on a great adventure. Frankly, I thought it over last night and I decided to tell you the story, hoping perhaps to interest you and to wash my hands of all the other people who are so bothersome with their mistrust and their legal contracts and their businessmen's objections.

"There is the story, señor," he added with a touch of finality. "If you would like to share a great enterprise with me, I should be honored."

Greatly interested and more than fed up with rattling around in South American cities, I told him I'd give him

definite word the following day. That same night, while bathing and dressing, I decided to go. It would not take too much money, I liked Mendez, and the adventure would be worth a lot even if nothing came of it. I called to Carlos, who was stretched on his bed, smoking and looking at the ceiling.

"We're going to Ecuador," I said.

"Why?" he asked lazily.

"We're going on an expedition to hunt Inca gold."

"Inca gold? What's that?"

"It's the gold that belonged to your ancestors. It's a big treasure that was hidden in Ecuador."

"Ah, treasure. I had an uncle who spent his whole life looking for buried treasure." He got up in his wrinkled suit and settled himself more comfortably so as to do justice to the tale. "He used a candle that had been blessed by a priest. He put it in a gourd, lit it and prayed. Usually he recited the Lord's prayer backwards. Then the gourd would roll along the ground and stop on top of the treasure."

"Did he ever find any?" I asked, seriously.

"Not that I ever heard of. Not my uncle. Prayers wouldn't work for him because he was too full of sin. Patrón, what a man my uncle was! Que hombre! Did I ever tell you about the time the priest came to our village to say a fiesta, and my uncle hid all the good-looking girls in a chopana. Ay, señor, what a man! We had a drought for a whole year after that, just because the priest couldn't find his girls. All the crops dried up and my uncle had to run away to Bolivia.

"No, no. For a man like that the priest probably blessed the candle backwards so it wouldn't work in finding treasure. But many people have told me about the gourd and the candle, and they all say it works for a good Christian man."

"Very well then. In Quito you get yourself a gourd and a vela bendita. We're going to find this treasure."

"No joking, patrón. Are you really going after treasure?"

"Sure I am. What do you think I've been telling you?"

"Then I'm going along."

Of course, he was going along. Carlos was nothing to brag about as a valet, but on the trail he was a fine companion and an efficient worker. I wouldn't have left him behind for anything.

## Chapter VII

GUAYAQUIL, hot, humid, a typical tropical city of the kind found in the more lurid fiction about white-men-who-go-to-seed, is Ecuador's main port, far up the jungled Guayas River. We pushed our way up the river, mingling with other steamers, launches sailboats, bumboats and Indian dugout canoes, after an interminable seven-day voyage on an evil-smelling little coastal steamer loaded with Chilean nitrate; she poked her nose into every little port for no apparent reason.

Señor Mendez was more enthusiastic than ever about our quest, and talked in glowing language of everything from the beauties of Quito to the enrapturing magic of Inca gold, from the joys of the trail in the jungles to his own high social connections in Ecuador and Peru. Though at first there had been something of an interesting thought-for-the-day in the idea that he came from the upper classes, and a Mendez had been mixed up in everything worth while that had ever happened in that part of the world since the first conquest, the notion was by now beginning to pall just a trifle.

In short, the fine Señor Mendez talked too much. He talked almost every waking hour from the time we got up in the morning till we went to bed at night, and he talked mostly about himself, having long finished the more exhaustible topics of conversation. He resented the presence of Carlos, as of a servant whom I should have kept in his place instead of treating him as a friend. Often I caught Carlos

looking at me with a poorly hidden grin on his face, as Mendez babbled away and I wished sincerely that I could trade places with my Chilean "valet" if only for the sake of occasional privacy.

Three days after arriving in Guayaquil, we took the train for Quito. All day we climbed up the mountains, over breathtaking ledges and hairpin turns, jogging along slowly to emerge again and again from secluded valleys to the magnificent panoramas spread out below us.

The Guayaquil-Quito Railroad is one of the most famous in South America, a completely "impossible" job that was finished in 1907 by a firm of well-known American engineers. It was a miracle of engineering, driven through by sweat and ingenuity, dollars and lives, at the beginning of our national-expansion fever. It trained a large number of American "tropical tramps," that honorable and swashbuckling race of construction men who swarmed for decades up and down the Isthmus and the West Coast, digging the Panama Canal, building such American properties as Cerro de Pasco, Chuquicamata, Portorillos, and Braden in Chile. It chugs along today, manned and managed by Ecuadoreans, making two or three trips a week between its two terminal cities, and breaking each voyage with an overnight tie-up at the halfway point of Riobamba.

Riding all day on the train, Mendez at last got down to cases about our expedition.

"Leave everything to me, leave everything to me," he had been saying airily all these days. "No se preocupe—don't fret yourself. I will make all arrangements and see to it that you travel in comfort as befits a gentleman."

I had no doubt that I'd travel like a gentleman—like an "honorable" one at that—but now I wanted to know a little



more about what our arrangements were to be. We had the map before us in the smoking car and went over it in detail.

"Here, señor, is Quito. We will be there tomorrow noon. We will take a car from Riobamba, that is faster than the train and more comfortable. Ah, Quito! The City of Seven Hills. The Paris of America. It is the most cultured city in all America. Señor, I can't wait to show it to you—the hotels, the bars, the beautiful women. We Ecuadoreans have the most beautiful women of all and we speak the most perfect Castilian. The music, the science, how they flourish there. And my ancestral home in the suburbs, where the first Mendez settled under a grant from Pizarro. I can't wait to show you the hospitality ——"

It was difficult to interrupt those lyrical moods, but something had to be done. For just one instant his face clouded as I pointed to the map and asked that we go on with the expedition.

"Ah, sí. Don't worry. You will see. We know how to travel in this country and I will make all arrangements. You have nothing to worry about. Nada, absolutamente nada. I will buy everything we need in Quito, and then we will hire a car to take us to Baños. There, that spot on the map. Baños. Do you know Baños? Have you heard of it? What, you haven't heard of it? Señor, it is one of the most renowned thermal resorts in this part of the world. Long before the conquistadores came, the ancient Incas used those springs to cure rheumatism and gout and everything else. Wait till you see those baths and feel their invigorating effects. They keep the population of Quito healthy. Hundreds of people come every year from Peru and Chile and Bolivia and Colombia to take the cure at Baños. And the social life there in the season—you should see it. I have known

men so crippled by rheumatism that they could hardly walk, and in one week ——”

Carlos was grinning at me from a point where Mendez couldn't see him, maliciously taking it all in. At the first opportunity I injected my little question to divert the tide in the proper direction.

“How do we go on from Baños? Ah, don't worry yourself. I will send a telegram ahead to have everything ready. I know my people and I will make all arrangements. There is a mule driver there who has served me for years. A thoroughly reliable man, the finest type of Ecuadorean workman. Don't you worry yourself. We will arrive in Baños in the evening and the very next morning the mules will be ready to take us on to Mera. You wait and see.”

“How do we go on from Mera?” I didn't want to give him a chance to go into raptures over another town.

“From Mera? Ah, señor, that is where the real adventure begins. There we enter the jungles of the Oriente. No mules, mind you. No mules can get over that trail. I will wire ahead and arrange for Indians to carry our loads.”

“Indians?”

“Yes, savages from the Upper Napo. Wild Indians without clothes. But don't fret yourself. They are not dangerous. They have served us white men for centuries and they have learned. There is a tradition in my family about the first Mendez who went to search for the cinnamon forests with Gonzalo Pizarro. He was one of the first to tame the Napo Indians. There is a story ——”

“Yes, my friend. You told me that story in Lima. So these are the Indians! Tell me, how does one deal with them? How are they paid? Do they speak Spanish?”

Mendez literally beamed at me. “One can deal with them

all right. One must be stern, of course, so as not to give them big ideas. One must treat them with an iron hand to keep them in their places. Don't worry, I will handle everything. I know my Indians and I will not permit them to cheat us. That is the first thing to look out for. A stranger like you comes along, a North American who does not know how to handle them and who doesn't know the country and its ways, and they try to cheat him right and left. I know those people and I have a very good friend in Mera who will act as interpreter. They are uneducated, of course. They are uncultured. They can't even speak Spanish but you will find them good and willing servants if you are careful not to let them get big ideas. They may be savages, but they have a certain native shrewdness that makes them try to take advantage of every white man who permits it. That is the Indian character."

Carlos, who made no bones about being half Indian, was still grinning at me from behind Mendez's back. I had to take him to task later for his complete lack of respect toward my friend and associate, even though the friendship, as a personal thing, was beginning to get badly on my nerves. Nevertheless the conversation with Mendez reassured me greatly. The man seemed, obviously, to know his business and to have thought about details. His rather irritating garrulousness was a minor problem that I would have to face sometime—especially when once we were on the trail. But it could wait until the preliminary arrangements had been made.

Mendez had not exaggerated the beauties of Quito. Nestled amid a group of surrounding hills, from which it looked like a billowing sea of beautifully mellowed red-tile roofs, within sight of two majestic snow-capped volcanoes that are almost

on the equator, it has an undeniable charm. The old world is mixed with the new—we lived in an excellent and thoroughly up-to-date hotel, surrounded by houses that date back to the earliest days of the Spanish conquest. Indians in colorful woolen clothes bring their wares to market, where they hawk everything from reed panpipes through roasted ears of corn to wool ponchos and blankets. Picturesque Indians with their hair done up in pigtails clean the streets. They are a fine, proud-looking people. I was told that they have the street-cleaning concession as their own and that they take pride in doing their work and doing it well.

Mendez set about his business of tending to everything and it was a relief to have him bustling around the town, organizing the expedition, while Carlos and I saw the sights, drank cocktails at the hotel bar—and shelled out the money. Every evening Mendez met us to tell us what to see the next day, to talk in glowing if rather vague terms about all he had accomplished, and to ask for money. I was his “guest” in Quito, and a stranger who didn’t know the ropes. He considered it his duty as a gentleman to make things pleasant for me and to do all the work while I amused myself. He only hoped that he would soon be so far along that he could take us out to the suburbs to receive us in his palatial ancestral home that the first Mendez had built, and so on and on and on.

The Ecuadorean’s preoccupation with expedition affairs was a relief for a while, but doubts began to crowd in on me little by little, as the expenses went up. This thing was beginning to cost more than I had anticipated and I began to wonder how one went about checking up on affairs as conducted by a capable and honorable gentleman.

Then, one afternoon, something happened that made me resolve, finally, to take a stronger hold. Carlos and I were

sitting on a bench in the residential part of the city when an elderly man sat down beside us. In a moment he began the conversation, with the grave courtesy of the finest type of Latin American, which excludes all thought of nosiness.

"Are you strangers in Quito? I take it you are either English or North American."

He wanted me to consider Quito "my city," and he began to talk steadily about it. Very entertainingly he told of the political situation, the financial crisis, the loss of his own fortunes, the troubles with Peru over the boundary problem. Before parting I decided to try a shot in the dark about Mendez.

"Do you happen to know a Don Arturo Mendez?" I asked with no show of eagerness.

"Arturo Mendez? Let me think a minute. Is he about thirty-five, quite handsome, dark complexioned, and dressed like a millionaire?"

"That's the man."

My informant hesitated a moment. "I know who he is," he said finally, slowly, as if reluctant to say anything more.

"Where's his home?" I asked, rather expecting him to point to one of the magnificent mansions near by.

"He doesn't live in this neighborhood." And then, a trifle grimly, "He has a room on the other side of town."

"So?" Was I in the hands of a complete faker and confidence man? I decided I'd better go a bit easy in this.

But wasn't he married? Yes, he and his wife lived in one small room. The old gentleman had known her as a young girl. A beautiful girl. Poor creature. Life was not too easy.

He checked himself suddenly, as though he had already said too much to a total stranger. Then he looked at his

watch, got up, bade us good-bye, hoped again that we would have a pleasant time in Quito, and departed.

Carlos and I sat for a minute in silence. It was a shock to me to find that Mendez had been lying. Carlos spoke up first.

"I never trusted that man from ——"

"Keep quiet, Carlos. I've got to think this through."

While walking back to the hotel I decided on a plan of action. I was in this venture now and was reluctant to pull out of it at this stage. The fact that Mendez had lied to me about one thing did not necessarily mean that he had lied all the way through. On the train he had shown a good deal of knowledge of the route to be taken and arrangements to be made. There was no reason to decide that the map and the entire story of the treasure were faked, just because he had indulged a bit too freely in the perhaps-understandable habit of exaggerating himself and his own standing and importance. No, this was not the time to give up the whole scheme, though it was obviously the time to do a checking up.

At the hotel he approached us eagerly, as always, with shining eyes and bubbling over with accounts of what he had done that day. My sober mien stopped him for once.

"Señor Mendez, I'd like to go over the things that you have bought."

"Certainly. Certainly. You will find everything correct. I assure you that nothing has been forgotten and you will travel in comfort."

"I don't doubt it, but I'd like to check it over just the same."

When I saw the list, I was staggered. The essentials were there, of course: dynamite, fuses, and caps, for blowing away the bulkhead at the lake, tools for digging, food, and the like.

But what food! Wine, canned lobster, pâté de foie gras—a tremendous assortment of the finest luxuries.

“Hombre!” Carlos exclaimed in glee. “Patrón, this is the way it was at Lake San Francisco. Hombre! We eat on this expedition.”

Mendez glared at him. “Shut up, Carlos,” I said.

There were two rifles on the list, revolvers for all of us, several shotguns with mountains of shells, and gallons of citronella to keep the mosquitoes away. There was an individual tent for each of us—“better than that chopana at Barrancas Blancas,” muttered the irrepressible Carlos, hardly able to keep the contempt out of his voice. There was a kerosene stove, folding chairs, folding tables, and even a folding bathtub. There was a vast array of clothing to make up a special exploration costume for Mendez, who had thoughtfully refrained from buying similar things for us until we could go along to see that they fitted. There were presents for the Indians. My head began to reel at the thought of the horde of Indians who would be needed to transport all that stuff into the wilderness. I saw one item on the list that puzzled me.

“What’s that?”

Mendez beamed his proudest beam. “That? It is the finest item of comfort that you could possibly have. Indispensable. It is a folding chair-toilet.”

Here Carlos let out a snort, his face widening into a broad grin. “Patrón, now we must surely find the gold. We shall need it. All of it. The whole Inca treasure.”

Mendez flushed with anger under the impertinence.

“Carlos,” I said sternly, “get the hell out of here. When I want your remarks I’ll let you know.”

Carlos went away, still grinning broadly. I could see that

Mendez was going to remonstrate with me again about my servant, but I forestalled him.

"I think," I said as simply as I could, "that you have too much stuff here. I am in favor of sending about half of it back."

The man looked horrified. "But you can't do that! It isn't done! These things are all bought and paid for. Besides, they are absolutely essential. You just believe me. I know how to travel down there. A man in your position—think of it! You can't travel like an ordinary peon. You must make yourself comfortable and keep up appearances. What will the Indians say? They will lose all respect ——"

"Yes, yes, I know all that." Mentally I was estimating the value of all that pile of stuff, and comparing it with the amounts of money that I had given Mendez. It seemed to me that I had been vastly overcharged.

"Is this all we will need?" I asked.

"All? No, sir. Besides your clothing and your man's, we will still have to have a good many things, machetes, mosquito nets—" He rattled off a long list. Obviously he had been thinking about the problem of getting up a modern "well-equipped" expedition. The only thing I was grateful for was that he didn't drag "science" into the picture, insisting, like a lot of explorers, that we had to have everything that modern science could provide. Most of the things that he enumerated sounded reasonable enough, and I added such items to them as a well-stocked medicine chest.

"All right," I finally said. "But from now on I'd like to do the buying. And if there are any bills still to be paid on the things you have already bought, I want to see the bills themselves and get receipts for payment from the merchants."

For an instant he glared at me as though he was going to



explode over the "insult" that I had handed him—an honorable gentleman. But then he checked himself, threw up his hands in a gesture of resignation, and said, "Very well."

He walked away, tight-lipped. The faith that I still had in the man was based largely on the fact that he obviously counted on going along into the interior. I couldn't imagine his being such a fool as to accompany us if the whole thing was a wild-goose chase. Under those conditions, I reasoned, he would simply have tried to sell me the map and to chisel as much as possible on outfitting the expedition, while remaining in Quito himself.

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## Chapter VIII

IT TOOK eighteen days in Quito merely to get our three-man expedition equipped and to make all the "necessary" arrangements. But at last came the great day of departure.

Even Don Arturo Mendez seemed a bit chagrined when he saw his pile of impedimenta assembled. He had ordered a car to take us to Baños. It arrived on time, and we spent an hour or so cramming everything possible into it, tying vast piles of stuff on the running boards, in back, and even on top—the chauffeur making sarcastic remarks as he helped with the work. When the car was so loaded that the springs were almost collapsed, it seemed as if we had hardly made a dent in the mountain of equipment.

Flustered, Mendez ran off to get a truck. It took him an hour to return with one and the driver tried to charge exorbitant emergency prices. We lost another half hour in excited haggling, before we could even begin to load the truck, with a crowd of children and grownups standing by to watch, to urge the truck driver to stick by his guns on price, and to make delighted and half-sneering comments on various items in our pile of belongings.

Carlos spent most of his time muttering to himself and glaring balefully at Mendez. Again I had to caution him in no uncertain terms to treat the man with civility. But my fears about the expedition grew rapidly. At the very least there was serious trouble ahead between those two. Some-

how, somewhere, Carlos was going to explode and tell the Ecuadorean exactly what he thought of him.

I was tired, fearful and discouraged when we finally pulled into Baños five hours later, to be received by another gaping crowd that watched us unload. Mendez, by the way, had no enthusiasm for work. He had acquired a riding crop to match his beautiful costume, and seemed to consider it his share of the job to stand by and tap his boots imperiously, pointing the crop every once in a while to give some trivial and wholly unnecessary instruction—in a manner that indicated how heavily the responsibility rested on his capable shoulders.

Baños itself did nothing to relieve my heavy spirits. Instead of the gay, colorful, and wealthy spa that Mendez and everybody in Quito had raved about so enthusiastically, I found a drab village of ramshackle frame buildings, slatternly and unkempt. It was off-season, of course, and every resort town looks desolate during the months when there's nobody resorting in it, but that didn't explain the paint that had evidently been peeling off the buildings for years, the general sad air of collapse, the population's apathy, and the dust that had been allowed to collect on the floors of the "best" hotel.

I thought that a hot, therapeutic bath in the far-famed thermal springs might ease my fearful restlessness. But I lost all inclination to bathe when I saw the tubs—old, dilapidated, and most of them out of repair.

The bathhouse keeper squealed at me. "It is not the season. It is not the season. You should see this place when the season is on. Life, automobiles everywhere, music, dancing. You should see it when it is really gay."

Oh, to hell with the season! I had work to do. Restlessly I roamed around, impelled by only one burning desire—to get

out of Baños quickly, to plunge into the interior as soon as possible.

I returned to the hotel to find Mendez having a drink and a chat with the proprietor. Who had been there the past season? Who was coming? What about the scandal about the Señora del Toro? A pretty story—no? Was that young poet still hanging around? . . .

"Mendez," I broke in, "I'm sorry to have to interrupt this most engaging conversation. But we have things to attend to. Where is the mule skinner you ordered?"

He grinned, airily and infuriatingly. "These North Americans," he said to the hotelkeeper. "They are always in a hurry—no? Their energy, their vitality. That is what makes them a great nation."

He said it with just a touch of a sneer. The hotelkeeper merely grinned. Mendez saw me preparing to say something pretty cutting, and so he turned to me.

"Don't worry, my friend. No se preocupe. All arrangements are made and we will leave in the morning. He is a reliable man. He will be here in the morning with his mules."

"I want to see him. I want to talk to him. Now!"

The hotelkeeper interrupted. "But, señor, dinner is almost ready. You can't go now. You must eat your dinner. You have had a long and tiresome journey from Quito."

I insisted, and finally, with a resigned shrug, Mendez consented to go with me and Carlos to find the man. After a long search and much questioning, we found him in a bar. I didn't give Mendez a chance to talk to him. I told him to be at the hotel with his mules, ready to leave, at five in the morning. I insisted, moreover, that I wanted no delay at that time.

"No delay, do you hear? I don't want you to discover at

the last moment that one of the mules needs to be shod. I want all the packsaddles to be ready—everything—all ready to be loaded.”

The man proved most obliging. *Sí, señor*. Of course, of course. Everything would be ready. I was not to worry about a thing. I was in capable hands. At five in the morning—just before sunrise. He and his mules would surely be there.

Carlos threw in an innocent question. How many pack mules were there to be, by the way?

How many? Why, five, of course. Five, as the *señor* had ordered.

Five? Carlos shrugged his shoulders. Five?

“That means that we will have to make two trips. We are equipped. We travel like *caballeros*. You should see the stuff that we have along. What good will five pack mules do?”

“Carlos,” I interrupted sternly. “Shut up and get out of here.” But he was perfectly right, and Mendez looked sheepish as well as angry.

When the matter was finally straightened out, we walked back to the hotel.

“I assure you,” said Mendez, “we will not have to start at five. We can start at nine and get to Mera in perfect comfort.”

I wanted to tell him that I had only said five because I was sure that it would mean seven at the very earliest. But I tried to hold my peace.

“I wish to God we were getting out of here right now,” I said as we stomped into the hotel for our dinner.

My mood of frustration grew on me, as Mendez and the proprietor got together again as old friends, gossiping and laughing. Uncertain, I was convinced that they changed the topic of conversation whenever I came within hearing.

I had to get out of there.

We retired early, to have a good night's sleep and be ready early in the morning. We had been given one room with three beds in it. I looked at my bed and demanded that the sheets be changed. The hotelkeeper remonstrated.

"Señor, don't argue. I want them changed."

"But they are clean. They have been used only two nights. A very fine gentleman slept in that bed only two nights. He was a judge from Quito."

"I don't care who slept in them. I will *not* sleep in them. I want those sheets changed."

After much grumbling, and doubtlessly many asides about stupid gringos, the man finally gave me my way.

I made myself as comfortable as possible, and prepared for sleep, with vague but insistent fears racing through my head. I tossed around for a while, annoyed by Mendez's snoring. Damn him—why couldn't he shut up even in his sleep? A fine expedition this was turning out to be! Listen to that fellow snore. Even his railings and raspings seemed to have an arrogant, contemptuous note. The first Mendez who came with Pizarro; the first Mendez who looked for Inca gold. Inca gold, Inca treasure, Inca gold—piles of it, mountains of it, floating away in the distance, out of reach, always out of reach like shifty lies. A pile of lies. A mountain of lies, gleaming and shining like Inca treasure. Like Carlos's fool's gold at Lake San Francisco. Carlos had sold his "gold" to a wandering Turco. A fool of a Turco. Was I a fool of a Turco to go on this adventure?

Damn it, what was I doing on this expedition anyway?

Suddenly alert again, in one of those random moments that come to a disturbed man when he is falling asleep, I wanted to jump up then and there and return to Quito.

I lay in bed and felt the sensation. To hell with all this.

Quito—New York—God's country. Back home where men  
—back home —

Gradually, fitfully, I dropped off to sleep.

But not for long. Suddenly I was wide awake again. Something had bitten me.

Bedbugs! Then I felt the bites in several places at once. I reached for the flashlight. They were not bedbugs at all. They were fleas, having a wonderful time. I smeared myself with citronella but it did no good. I tossed and scratched as long as I could stand it, and then got up to look at my watch. It was ten o'clock. Carlos was sitting on the side of his bed. Mendez was still snoring.

"Que pasa, patrón?" Carlos said softly. "What are you going to do? I can't sleep. Pulgas. There are fleas."

"I'm getting up. Get up and get dressed. We're leaving Baños. We're going to get the mules together right now."

We groped through the starry night and found the mule skinner still at the bar where we had seen him before. I believe I would have returned to Quito if the car and the truck had still been there. But they had left, and mules offered the only means of leaving the town.

The man was with four or five companions, all talking at once in high, alcoholic voices. I asked him to get to work immediately. I wanted to leave Baños at once.

"At once. Señor, no se puede. It can't be done. I must ——"

"At once. I must leave now."

"Ay, Dios! I meant to tell you. I have been thinking it over and I can't go at all. I can't go tomorrow even. Es imposible. I have no shoes. I have only three saddles for you three, and that means I will have to walk. I have no shoes, señor. I can't walk to Mera on bare feet."

"All right. All right. I'll rout out a shopkeeper and buy you a pair of shoes."

"No, no. Es imposible. The man who was going with me has to stay home because his wife is going to have a baby. And I have no food. My own wife is too sick to prepare any food. I would have gone to the hotel to tell you, but I thought you were asleep. You have no idea how sick my wife is. Ay, what suffering. No man worthy of the name would think of deserting his wife at a time like this."

His friends stood around and nodded their heads solemnly. But I was more than ever determined to let nothing stand in my way.

"That's all very well. We can fix all that. I will buy you shoes; I will buy food for you; I will get a doctor— Damn it, I'll buy you a new wife if you insist."

The spectators burst into a laugh and the mule skinner began to grin. Carlos ribbed him a bit—good-naturedly—and soon we were in his pasture, rounding up mules. Carlos had borrowed a lasso and swung it expertly. "He knows his work," the mule skinner said to me with admiration. We had no more trouble with him. Carlos talked his language and the two were friends.

We found two men to help the skinner, got them out of bed, routed out a shopkeeper to sell us a pair of shoes, saddled the animals, and soon had them all ready in front of the hotel. By now it was about four A.M., and Carlos and I went inside to waken Mendez.

He looked at me through half-open eyes when I shook him. Sleepily he murmured, "Aren't you ever going to sleep?" Then he dropped off again.

I was in no mood for fooling or diplomacy.

"Get up, Mendez." I shook him again. "Get up now if you



want to go with us. You can stay here if you want, but we're leaving. All the mules are ready, and we're leaving at once."

He was wide awake in an instant, and stared at me in surprise and annoyance.

"You can't do that. You can't leave now. It's still dark."

"Like hell I can't. We're leaving."

"But I haven't had my coffee. I must have my coffee. It is dangerous to ride away on an empty stomach. You don't know this country. This climate. The night air is dangerous. And with an empty stomach. It is very bad for the health."

"Oh, nuts!" I mumbled in English, as I stalked away to pound the surprised and chagrined hotelkeeper out of his bed and demand that he make us some coffee and prepare the bill. I could hear him muttering things to himself about "gringo loco." I went outside to tend to loading the mules. I felt better now.

We worked quietly and efficiently without Mendez around to mess into things. The mules, ghostly at first, began to take on semblance and shape as the first faint flush of dawn lit the sky. Again I could feel the stirrings of anticipation and adventure prickling my blood.

I had taken hold and asserted myself.

## *Chapter IX*

WE RODE out of Baños past several gaunt, vacant-looking houses that had perhaps been fashionable resort hotels at one time. The only sign of life was at the public market, where lights flickered in some of the booths, as farmers prepared their produce for early shoppers. It was a long day's ride that brought us to Mera late in the evening. Most of the way I dozed and slept in the saddle.

Mera proved to be a mere settlement of about eight houses. There were no roads, only paths. We were told that our Indians, about thirty-five Napos, had arrived the day before. Too tired to see anybody, we went to sleep. The storekeeper had kindly allowed us to set up our cots in a vacant room in his house.

At dawn the next morning I was awakened by the treading of bare feet on the veranda outside our room. The sound of guttural voices came drifting in. Several Indians were peering curiously at us through the windows. Quietly I dressed and went outside.

The porch was filled with Indians and they overflowed onto the path. They were naked except for breechclouts, of medium height, copper-colored, sturdy and superbly muscled. Most of them greeted me with "Buenos dias" (so they knew at least some Spanish), but ignored me after that. The entire group stood motionless as I went among them, looking me over stolidly but without expression on their faces.

A middle-aged man stepped forward and addressed me in Spanish:

"You are the gentleman who sent for the Napos?"

"Yes. There are three of us. The other two are still sleeping. We want to travel to the interior, to the headwaters of the Napo, and we need bearers for our baggage."

I had decided to finish the business of fixing the Indians' pay before Mendez got up. Wanting to deal with one alone, I walked away from the house, motioning the man to follow. He came—and so did the other thirty-four. The whole group circled around us, listening and looking on.

"You are the head man?" I asked.

"Sí, señor. My name is Matas. We are at your service. We are ready to take you and carry your belongings. How much will you pay and how long will the trip take?"

"We will probably be gone from four to six weeks, and I will pay you the customary wages."

"Money is of no use to us down where we live. Napo Indians prefer merchandise. What merchandise did you bring?"

This was news to me, and something that Mendez had evidently not thought of. Merchandise? I informed Matas that we had brought only our equipment and a few trinkets. With that they all began to talk among themselves in their native Quechua, the old Inca tongue, ignoring me completely. Finally the headman turned to me:

"I think we can come to an agreement. Can you give us a rifle and ammunition? I will also want a hat like yours," pointing to my pith helmet. "And that fellow back there wants a pair of trousers. If you can give us those things we will be able to go with you for six weeks."

I had expected to pay much more for the services of thirty-





five men for a month and a half, and I was anxious to close the deal. "How much ammunition will you want?"

There was more jabbering among the Indians. "A hundred rounds," Matas said finally.

I had brought five hundred rounds, and agreed to his terms at once. The Napos asked to see the rifle. I went into the house for it and gave it to them. They passed it from hand to hand, hefting it and sighting along the barrel. All of them nodded their approval. The deal was concluded, payment to be made on the job's completion.

No sooner had the bargain been struck than the Indians began going over our pile of luggage, dividing the weight evenly into individual loads. Now it was again as though I didn't exist. They turned their complete attentions from one thing to another. An agreement having been reached with me, they didn't need me any longer. They knew more than I did about the task in hand, said nothing, and asked no questions. I had the satisfying feeling of being in the hands of competent workers.

Carlos came out and built a fire in the open. We made coffee and fried bacon and eggs for breakfast. One by one the Napos drifted over and squatted around us in a circle, watching us unblinkingly. Finally Mendez arrived on the veranda, where he stood to survey the scene while tapping his boots with the riding crop. Then he called to ask me into the house.

"Merryman," he began, "I'd better go right to work to arrange payment for the Indians. They're queer people to deal with but I've had a lot of experience with them. They know me and they won't try to cheat. Please give me the money so I can tend to the business."

I started to tell him that the job was already done, but I

was curious to see what he was going to say. I checked myself and asked him, instead, how much money he wanted.

"Let's see." He pondered for a minute, figuring things into a lump sum. Finally he asked for something in sueres that was the equivalent of about six hundred dollars.

"Six hundred dollars!" I exclaimed in astonishment.

"Of course," he said, with a touch of annoyance in his voice. "You can't get these people to work for nothing. It may take a little less, and it may take more, but I'll have to bargain with them around that figure." He looked at me coolly, toying with his tropical helmet. This was the moment I had been waiting for, and I answered him as coolly and as steadily as I could.

"I'm afraid it won't be necessary," I said. "I got up early this morning while you were still asleep. I hated to disturb you, and so I arranged the terms with the Indians myself. It's all fixed and I think I did rather well. I believe that even you couldn't have done better."

His face flushed and I saw the anger mounting, as he tried without too much success to control himself.

"You did it? You made the arrangements? That is my job. What do you know about dealing with Indians?"

"I know better than six hundred dollars' worth. They are going with us for one rifle, a hundred rounds of ammunition, a pith helmet, and a pair of pants. Could you have done better?"

He stared at me in speechless fury. I turned to go, but suddenly he caught my arm. His dark eyes were narrowed viciously, and his face was livid. "What do you mean?" he asked. "What are you trying to do?" His voice was taut and his even white teeth were bared.

I wheeled on him. "All right, I'll tell you. I'm sick of your

tall tales. If you know anything about this gold, we'll go and get it. But you keep your mouth shut. All I'll expect from you is directions along the trail. We're using my money and I'm the boss from now on. Do you understand?"

He made a determined effort to control himself as he saw that my anger was real and that I meant what I said. In a calmer tone he said, "You have something against me. I have felt it for days. What is it? So far everything has gone as we planned under my leadership. What is it that you have against me?"

Again I was tempted to come out with the entire story, but I decided that the time had not yet come. I was really interested in the Inca gold and I wanted to do nothing that would force us to give up the quest. I had talked myself into believing that Mendez was telling the truth in his story about the treasure. Hence I controlled myself.

"As the backer of this expedition," I said as calmly as I could, "I feel it my right to take charge of money matters. This thing has already cost me a lot more than I had counted on and I'm not made of money. Now I'm taking hold to keep down expenses. Take it or leave it. The mules are still here and you can still go back to Baños if you don't like my terms. But speak up if you don't like the new arrangement. I'm the boss after this."

He glared at me, utterly speechless for a moment. Having had the relief of a showdown with him at last, I felt more kindly disposed toward him. After all, it had been partly my fault that he had been able to chisel on me all these weeks.

"Carlos has breakfast all ready," I said. "Come over and have some."

He didn't answer. Without a word he pushed past me and went over to the edge of the veranda, where he sat sulking,



and nervously smoking innumerable cigarettes while Carlos and I ate. The Indians stared curiously, looking first at Mendez, then at Carlos, and then at me. They hardly moved and there was only an occasional mutter among them. Finally Mendez went into the house to have a cup of coffee with the storekeeper.

By seven o'clock the Indians were ready to start. Each stood beside his load, looking at me for the word to swing them up. Now that I was definitely in command, all my old doubts and fears had left me, and I felt the thrill of the unknown tingling in my veins. Ahead of us, behind the dark screen of the forest, lay the menace of python and jaguar, of savage Indians, and the mystery of Inca gold. My differences with Mendez became, to me, a mere minor irritation.

I hitched up my cartridge belt, with the heavy .45 suspended from it, and turned to tell Mendez that everything was ready. He wasn't in sight. I went into the house, where he sat at coffee, with the storekeeper, the mule skinner, and the latter's two assistants. I called to him but he didn't answer. "We're leaving at once," I said as I turned to go.

The storekeeper, a thin, sickly old man, followed me out of the house. Nonchalantly picking his teeth, he said, "The man says he is returning to Quito."

I nodded. The map was in my duffle bag and I felt I was entitled to it in return for all the money that Mendez had cost me. I called the headman and told him to leave Mendez's personal effects behind. The Indians were swinging up their loads, supported in the middle of their backs by head-straps. They stood ready, in stooped positions, when Mendez appeared on the veranda.

"I hear you're returning to Quito," I said. "I'm leaving your baggage."

One of the Napos was kneeling in front of me. On his back was a chairlike contraption, made of bamboo.

"What's this?" I asked Matas without waiting for an answer from Mendez.

"It's for the señor to ride in. One man will carry you half a day and then another will take you. We have three chairs, one for each of you."

"To ride?" The Indian looked much smaller than I. "No, thank you. I'm walking."

"So am I," said Carlos promptly.

Suddenly Mendez spoke up from the porch. "Well, I'm not. I will ride as befits a caballero." He strode arrogantly up to the Indian who had stooped to take me aboard. "Get down," he said, as though to an animal.

"So you're going, after all?" I asked, disappointed.

"I've come this far. I might as well finish it. Why should I let you have all the booty?"

The storekeeper had been watching us indifferently. "I'd suggest that you ride the first two kilometers," he said, still picking his teeth. "There's a marsh just outside of Mera and the mud is over your boottops. You'll get into trouble. These Indians are used to it and can get you through."

Matas nodded agreement. "We can save you trouble that way. After that you can walk if you want."

"All right. All right. Get into your chair, Carlos." Mendez grinned maliciously as we seated ourselves, though I had the feeling that he was chagrined. Had he decided to come along just for the pleasure of seeing Carlos and me floundering through the marsh?

The kneeling Napos straightened themselves up with no apparent effort. In the days to come I developed a high admiration for them, if only as physical specimens. While

they were solidly built, they nevertheless didn't look as though they could carry loads of up to a hundred and eighty pounds, hour after hour, day after day. No great bulging muscles rippled under their skins, and not one of them was as large as Mendez or myself. What they had, however, was a rhythm of movement and an ease of manner that permitted them to perform prodigious feats of strength without tiring and without apparent effort. They did their work with the same beautiful, easy swing with which a skilled axman cuts through a tree, stroke after effortless stroke; with the same grace that an expert ditchdigger displays as he swings his shovel hour after hour, moving incredible quantities of dirt without once hurrying, straining, or stopping to rest.

We passed through an area of scrubby vegetation and high, coarse grass. Riding in the chair was not so comfortable as I had expected, but that may well have been because I hadn't learned the trick. I was tense as I swayed back and forth on my perch; the movement was far different from the lope of an easy-gaited horse. I could see that the Indian beneath me adjusted himself easily and unconsciously to even the slightest change in the ground, but I hadn't yet learned the trick of fitting myself into the movement without fighting it; I was no help, either to him or to myself. Mendez, on the other hand, sat in his chair with complete indifference, smoking a cigarette and apparently enjoying himself.

We came to the marsh and my Napo sank into the mud up to his hips. I had to hold onto the chair as he swung his body from side to side to pull his legs free of the treacherous muck. But again I could see Mendez, completely at ease. I had to admit that when it came to riding human beings he was a better man than I.

Carlos and I got down to walk after we'd reached the other side of the marsh, but Mendez stayed in his chair, observing us with a sneering smile.

For nine days we walked up and down rolling hills, through great fields of breast-high grass, and past straggling forests. We saw no sign of any human being besides ourselves. Day after day, through this empty empire, which revived all of Carlos's bucolic daydreams and pioneer instincts.

"Caramba, patrón, look at this grass. Que riqueza! What wealth. If one could have a herd of cattle here—all the world to fatten them in—all the world to oneself."

Rains were increasingly frequent, and after a hard down-pour the clay soil became so slippery that we had to carry pointed sticks to help us keep our footing. Nevertheless, the Indians trudged on—nonchalantly if not cheerfully. Mendez sat in his high perch, paying no attention to us, only occasionally abusing his bearer with a string of coarse oaths. Carlos glowered at him but kept his peace on my insistence.

"The conquistadores," he muttered to me once. He had learned a good deal about them through listening to our talk. "The first Mendez who went with Pizarro. So he used to hunt Indians with dogs! This one's just like him. He sits up there and wishes he had a pack of dogs."

"Keep quiet, Carlos." I was afraid that his feelings would someday boil over, to precipitate an open break. "I'm running this show now, and I must insist on your doing nothing to stir up trouble. Hold your peace!"

"Peace!" He muttered for a while. Then he thought of a story and his good nature reasserted itself.

"Patrón, did I ever tell you about the mining engineer who came to our village in Chile looking for men? He was going to the other side of the mountains and he had an automobile."

"An automobile?"

"Sí, señor. He had an automobile that he could take apart. He spread it into little pieces and he hired men from my village to pack them on mules to the other side. He was going to put it together again there."

"How did it work?"

"Not very well. He wasn't a very nice engineer. He treated his men about the way Señor Mendez treats these people. He discovered that it wasn't practical to take an automobile over the Andes on muleback."

"What happened, Carlos?"

"Happened? Nothing much happened. What do our people know about automobiles? This engineer just kept losing pieces all along the way. I could take you there and I'll bet you could still find screws and bolts up there in the mountains. Just one piece here and another there, when nobody was looking. He was an evil-tempered engineer. His automobile—what is left of it—is still lying in a rusty heap at the place where he sweated for several days to get it together. Imagine an engineer who can't get his own automobile together."

All this was said with perfect innocence. "Carlos," I asked sharply, "did you have anything to do with it?"

"I?" in surprise. "Why, patrón, I wasn't even along. Nobody had anything to do with it. My people are good mule packers. It was just an accident. God just wanted that automobile to fall to pieces on the way."

When Carlos had that innocent mien I knew something was brewing. But there was nothing I could do about it except to remind him again rather sharply that I was in command and that I would stand for no tricks.

"See to it," I said, "that God doesn't get any funny notions this time."

"I?" with an air of deep hurt. "I was only trying to tell you a story to amuse you."

As we descended the eastern slope of the Andes the weather became steadily hotter and more tropical. Occasionally, too, thick swarms of mosquitoes and other insects made life unbearable. The rainy season was coming on, and we were soaked to the skin daily by torrential showers. I had a rubber coat along, but couldn't wear it because of the heat.

The straggly brush country was giving way to truly tropical vegetation. Great plants reared themselves along the faint Indian trail, and strange trees began to appear as we neared the heavy jungle proper. The Indians, however, seemed to avoid the dense forest. They skirted around it but often we had to push through brush up to our chests, the thorns and branches tearing at our clothes.

"Que hombres," said Carlos in admiration as he watched the Napos going through those dense stretches. "What skins they must have. Perhaps that is why they don't wear clothes. They would tear them to pieces in one day."

The great Mendez rode high on his portable chair, a sarcastic smile always about his lips as he watched us tear great rifts in our shirts and sew them up again at night. We paid no attention to him and spoke to him only when it was absolutely necessary.

I could understand something, now, about the reputed thick skins of the Indians. It seemed to me that they probably were not any thicker by nature than those of the white man, but that they were rubbed, worn, pounded, massaged, and scratched thick through constant contact with underbrush on the trail, much as a callus is created on a man's foot through the chafing of a shoe. Months later I heard of the troubles in a little mission hospital in the Amazon Basin that

catered to the needs of the jungle Indians. It seemed that there the greatest trouble lay in keeping an adequate supply of hypodermic needles. The skins of the Indians were so tough that every injection a doctor or nurse tried to give resulted in half a dozen needles being bent double or broken off before one could be pushed in.

We stopped one noon beside a small stream for lunch. Mendez was bringing up the rear in his chair, and we waited for him before preparing the food. In a few minutes we heard them coming through the bush. The Indian bearer was covered with perspiration and seemed exhausted. Mendez, seated in the chair on the Indian's back, was cursing the man in a steady stream, his face a picture of uncontrolled rage.

"What's the trouble now?" I asked impatiently.

"This careless dog ought to be whipped," growled Mendez. "If we had proper discipline on this expedition it would be done."

"There'll be no whipping around here. What's the matter with him?"

"He's too lazy to stoop under tree branches. He just gave me a devil of a bump."

I wanted to tell him it served him damn well right, but I contented myself by asking why he didn't try walking for a while. The Indian was nearly all in. Mendez glared furiously at me but said nothing.

We pushed on after the noon halt, endlessly, looking for a good camping place. We walked hour after hour, all afternoon, but there was neither shelter nor water. The thick darkness of the tropics descended on us, but we had to go on, pushing silently through the starry night. At last, about ten o'clock, we came to a small brook.

Several great palms reached up lankly, their tufts of leaves

at the top spreading out like big umbrellas to blot out the stars. Lush vegetation grew waist-high at their bases. Matas got his Indians to work, clearing away the brush and preparing a shelter of poles, with a roof thatched of palm leaves. But it was late and dark, and the Indians were dead-tired. That night the thatching was a flimsy job.

About two in the morning I awoke to hear the patter of rain on the leaves, and to feel great warm drops falling on my face. The downpour gathered momentum, and the water began to come through our roof as through a sieve. It was the tepid rain of the tropics, that did nothing to clear the atmosphere. It came down by the bucketful and the air seemed like a combination of steam and warm water.

We arose, put our rubber ponchos over our soaked clothing, and huddled miserably under trees and bushes to await the end of the rain. But the end wasn't in sight. The rain kept on and on, until the dawn at least brought us some light to see by.

There was no sign of a rift in the sky. Matas said it was likely to continue raining all day, and he advised us to start. Early in the afternoon, he said, we would come to a good shelter that he and his men had built on their way to Mera. He said we'd find dry wood there, and could dry out our clothes.

Soaked to the skin, with the water running in streams down my face, into my eyes and mouth, I agreed. Since the rain would continue anyway, and there was no chance to dry out where we were, we would do much better to go on—at least to be traveling and doing something. Carlos and the Indians seemed delighted when I gave the order. The men went to their packs and prepared to lift them.



Then there was a new hitch. Mendez just squatted where he was, sullen and miserable.

"Come on, Mendez. Time to get started."

"I'm not going."

"Not going?" I stared at him in amazement.

"I'm not going, I tell you. Not in this weather. I will not travel this way. I'll not move a step until I have some dry clothes."

All of us stared at the man. Even the Indians seemed to look on him with anger. I was undecided for a moment, wondering what would happen if I simply gave the order to move on and left him alone where he was. Then he spoke again.

"It's those lazy dogs, building that shelter. If there had been any kind of discipline on this expedition—if anybody but an incompetent gringo who thinks he knows ——"

Here Carlos suddenly stepped in, his face flaming with anger.

"You damned Ecuadorean crook," he said. "You sneaky caballero with the big house in Quito. You keep your mouth shut. If I were the boss, I'd damn well leave you here. You wouldn't go another step."

Mendez turned pale with fury. "Do you allow this man to insult me?" He shouted it, all restraint gone. "I am a gentleman. Do you know who I am? This confounded Chilean peon—I've had enough of his insolence."

In a flash, Carlos leaped at him as if to hit him. Mendez stepped back, pale with fury. Then he reached for his revolver. There wasn't a second to lose. Both men were thoroughly on edge and meant to tangle. I jumped between them.

"Stop it, you pair of damned fools. Stop it! You're both crazy."

They stood and looked at me for an instant and I seized the opportunity to give them a good tongue-lashing.

"Carlos, I've told you again and again to keep a civil tongue. I'll have no more of this. I'll send the two of you back if you don't behave yourselves. And, Mendez, you're acting like a damned woman. You can stay here if you like; God knows, I'll not move a step to save you. We're leaving now. Come along if you want."

Mendez moved a step toward me, menacingly. Carlos edged closer too, looking intently at the Ecuadorean, who had fortunately not drawn his revolver. There was a tense instant and then Mendez shrugged his shoulders, picked up his hat, climbed into his chair, and gave a sharp command to the Indian to get up.

We sloshed through the rain for a number of hours, soaked, tired, and footsore. I saw to it that Carlos and Mendez stayed apart. The latter just sat on his swaying perch and sulked, occasionally abusing his Indian when the going was a bit too rough to suit him.

About midafternoon we came to the shelter and built a fire from the moderately dry wood scattered under it. Mendez kept to himself, but Carlos took Matas aside for a mumbled conversation. I suspected that something was up, but could get nothing out of Carlos about it. His habitual good nature was restored, and by nightfall he was sitting by the fire, entertaining all the Napos with new verses of his one interminable song.

"Patrón, this is like the time when you and Juan and I found the mine near Lake San Francisco."

"It's more likely to be like that gold mine of yours that you sold to a Turco."

"Do you think that this time ——?"

"Carlos, I don't think. Go on and sing. Sing the verse about the gringo and the husband."

"The gringo and the—" Suddenly he had an idea. "Patrón, did I ever tell you about the village I saw once in Bolivia? It was an Indian village—they were all Indians there. But this is a strange thing—cosa bien rara. There were just six children in the village who were blond. Six little Indian children with blond hair and blue eyes, and they were all just seven years old. I tell you it was a rare thing. And their parents were very proud of them."

"What are you trying to tell me, Carlos?"

"It's the truth. All of them seven years old. I'll tell you what happened. There was supposed to be oil near the village, and seven years before there'd been a party of gringo oil engineers there to look into things. Oil engineers. They're worse than the curas—" He said it with profound admiration.

The next morning the sun rose, a flaming orb in a cloudless sky. Old troubles forgotten, rested, dried, we started cheerfully on the trail. About the middle of the morning I discovered what Carlos and Matas had plotted. We reached a river in which the water was up to our armpits. Carlos and I shed our clothes in order to cross it. Carlos was over first, and stood on the bank, looking back expectantly. Mendez's Indian waded into the stream while his passenger pulled his feet up delicately, so as not to get them wet. In the middle of the stream the bearer began to struggle valiantly against the current, Mendez sitting in his chair and abusing him.

"Come on, you dog. Get your footing. Por la grandissima, you foul beast, you're getting me wet."

The Indian took a few more steps. Suddenly he wavered, floundered a bit, and then fell over, disappearing completely under the water. In a moment he came up again, blowing,

his black head gleaming like a porpoise's. Nonchalantly, as if nothing had happened, he began to walk to shore, as Mendez's pith helmet drifted downstream. Then, at last, a tan boot kicked up over the surface and Mendez bobbed up, sputtering and splashing.

Carlos broke into peals of laughter, and even I had to laugh, much as I feared the trouble that might result. The Indians stood by and grinned. They must all have known about the plot, for they had arranged it so that Mendez's man crossed the river last—after all the rest had reached the far bank and could watch the performance.

Shivering from the river water, which had come down from some mountain snowcap, Mendez stripped himself and changed his clothes, cursing a blue streak all the while. But, surprisingly enough, he said nothing about the incident to anybody. Perhaps he never even suspected the plot. Matas detailed another man to carry his chair and we moved forward.

Beside every creek and river the Indians had buried a package of food on their way to Mera. Now they dug it up again. It was wrapped in banana leaves, and inside the package was a soft, white mass of mandioca, the root that provides the principal food of Indians as well as whites in the Amazon Basin.

There are two kinds of mandioca roots, the tops of which look almost alike, growing to a height of six or seven feet. The roots are three to four inches in diameter and about two feet long. One type is poisonous, but is made into an edible *fariña* when it is ground, the juice squeezed out, and the pulp roasted. The other is not poisonous in any state and can be eaten immediately, tasting like a stringy potato. The Indians put the mash in a large gourd of water, stir it a while, and

then drink off the water and eat the pasty mass that is left. Every noon, and at intervals of three or four hours on the trail, they gave me a cup of liquid from the mandioca gourd. I noticed that they offered it only to Carlos and me, never to Mendez. They called it chicha. The stuff was slightly fermented. Therefore, it was invigorating as well as refreshing—like a mild wine.

During the afternoon of the tenth day we came to a break in the half jungle. There was a clearing and a house, built of palm thatch. The Napos dropped their loads. A white man came out to meet us. Mendez greeted him effusively, like an old friend. The other had a puzzled smile on his face as he shook hands with him.

He was an Ecuadorean Indian agent, living alone in the wilderness.

"Come in," he said with simple hospitality. "Make yourselves at home. *Aqui tiene su casa*. Here is your house."

We threw ourselves into his hammocks and drank the coffee that he brought us. Courteously he refrained from asking our business. There was time enough to talk. We had finished the first stage of our journey.



The llama is an indispensable member of the Indian family. Its flesh provides food, its hair clothing and its back a useful means of transportation over the rugged Andean highways.





## Chapter X

I HAD a badly blistered heel and was tired, more from the constant strain of worrying about Mendez than from the trip's actual physical exertions. I asked the Indian agent if we could stay at his house a few days; I would be glad to pay him for his trouble and expense.

"Of course, señor. Make yourself at home. *Aquí tiene su casa.*" He said it with the simplicity of one who welcomed visitors every day and was glad to see them for the simple reason that he liked people. The man surprised and delighted me. Living alone out there in the wilderness, he saw white men only three or four times a year. Yet he seemed perfectly content to attend to his work, plant his garden, and deal with his Indian wards, as though it were the most pleasant and natural life in the world.

His house was built in two stories. The lower floor was furnished mainly with hammocks, while an addition housed chickens and pigs. A notched log served as stairway to the upper floor, which consisted of a bamboo floor and a thatched roof, with no side walls. At first I wondered how a man could be content to live month after month, year after year, in so flimsy a structure, which was built more or less on the pattern of a bandstand. It occurred to me later, however, that it was probably exactly right for the region's tropical climate. It was sturdy enough to stand up under any wind; it kept out the rain, and it let in the air. The problem of ventilation was solved; there was always a cooling draft blowing through the house.



I noticed details of its construction. There was no waste material, and no slipshod work. No nails, no iron of any kind, had been used. The beams, simple logs that were rough hewn only at the ends where they fitted together, were laid squarely and tied in workmanlike fashion with strips of bark. The palm-leaf thatch was laid on with beautiful precision and pattern, like straw thatch in European villages. When studying the well-modeled lines of the house as a structural unit, one could imagine an architect scratching his head for weeks, trying to achieve exactly that unstudied effect of artistry mixed with superb craftsmanship. It was the kind of structure that obviously belonged in the country where it was located. That, I believe, is exactly what modern architects strive for with varied success.

"Señor," I said to our host, "I have come to admire your house. At first it struck me as strange, but the more I study it the better I like it. You work for the government. Did the government build it for you?"

He laughed. "The government? What does the government know about building houses out here? The architects in Quito might study for a year, designing some kind of confounded palace for the sake of making me comfortable and impressing the Indians. But I wouldn't live in it. For this region this house is best. The Indians wouldn't be the least bit impressed if they saw me living in any other kind of house. They'd think I was crazy.

"I'll tell you something," he went on. "A year or so ago I had occasion to go to the Peruvian city of Iquitos—a low-land city on the Amazon. I had with me a few of the Indians from here. They had never seen a white man's city before and one would expect them to be impressed. I tell you, señor, they weren't. They were unhappy and they thought the

white men were crazy to live in so uncomfortable a place. Up here they had light, airy houses where the wind blew through the rooms and it was easy to keep things clean. Down there they had thick walls of bricks or cement or adobe, with only a few windows in them. I tell you it was too dark and too hot for them. They felt stifled and they couldn't sleep. And I felt exactly the way they did, because I had got used to this kind of thing. No, no, don't ever expect one of these Indians to be impressed by the white man's civilization."

The man interested me, and I pressed him about his house.

"This house? It was built for me by the Indians, of course. They are the best housebuilders here, and no white man can erect anything as sturdy and as well suited to the climate as they can. They've been at it for centuries; they've developed tricks of their own, and learned the trade well."

I had noticed that some of my own Napos had gone over the house minutely, studying every joint, exclaiming over this and disparaging that. The agent laughed when I mentioned it.

"They're like a lot of snooping housewives, visiting in each other's homes. They go over every detail. They're delighted if they can learn some new tricks to take home with them, but they're even more delighted if they can find some shoddy work to gossip about."

Obviously the man had a high respect for his wards. "In this country," he kept insisting, "they're better people than we white men. They know more than we do about how to get along here, and we can't move without their help. Even you, with all your equipment, couldn't come here without thirty-five Napos to show you the way and help you."

I glanced at Mendez, who was lolling in a hammock, airily smoking a cigarette. This, I knew, was a direct blow at the

arrogant "aristocrat's" entire philosophy, and the rankest heresy to his scheme of thinking. He looked as though he wanted to say something, but held himself in check, an expression on his face that seemed like a mixture of anger and profound distaste.

The agent asked me about Indian policy in the United States.

"I have heard," he said, "that in North America the Indians were almost exterminated. They were shot and hunted, and were then, finally, herded onto reservations where they live in poverty and degradation. Is that true?"

There were many things that I could have answered. One was that the United States had no open frontier left; another that the rubber boom in the Amazon Basin, the last great impingement of civilization on South America's jungled wilderness, was accompanied by unprecedented brutalities toward the aborigines. But I had no desire to get into an argument about Indian policies, leading to the old argument over whether or not the Latin Americans are more civilized and humane than their Yanqui neighbors. Nevertheless I *was* interested, maliciously, in taking a sly dig at Mendez, who was still taking in the whole conversation.

"It seems to me," I said slowly, "that brutality is often a matter of the moment's needs and of the individual. I believe there are white men today, Ecuadoreans, men of your own country, who treat the Indians like so many swine when they travel through here. Is that true?"

"Yes," slowly. "I am sorry to say that I have seen it happen."

"Then," I went on, "there are the conquistadores. I have heard how they treated the Indians. They shot them and

tortured them, raped them, killed them—and hunted them down with dogs.”

This was evidently more than Mendez could swallow. He leaped out of his hammock and stood for a moment glaring at me. Then, with an evident effort to control himself, he stalked out of the house.

The fat and genial agent looked after him, a quizzical smile on his face.

“Who is that man?” he finally asked.

That was a shock to me. “Don’t you know him?”

“He seems to know me. He greeted me like an old friend when you first arrived. But I can’t place him. I don’t remember ever seeing him before.”

“That’s odd. He told me that he met you here a year or so ago. He said that he came through here on an expedition to the interior, and you treated him extremely well. He’s been singing your praises.”

The agent, whose name I forget, shook his head slowly. “He’s never been here before. I have so few white men come to see me here; I know them all and I don’t forget them. This man has never been here.”

So! Again I had caught Mendez in a lie. This was serious and I was tempted to tell the whole story to my host. But I checked myself. I must think this through and go carefully. No matter what Mendez said, there might still be something to his map and to the story of Inca gold. I was too deeply involved, and too interested in the treasure search, to want to take any chances on blowing up the whole venture prematurely. I excused myself and went outside.

About two acres of cultivated land surrounded the house, where the agent raised mandioca, bananas, sweet potatoes, and corn. He seemed to live a nearly self-sufficient life, but

it was plain that it was not an easy one. The avid tropical vegetation kept encroaching on his field and it must have been a constant battle to keep the jungle away. So much, I thought, for the simple and easy life in the tropics, where men don't need to work because the food drops into their open mouths from the trees! Perhaps we white men had never yet really conquered the tropics for the simple reason that it is *more* difficult to live there than in the temperate regions, not less.

There was a good-sized stream flowing past the plantation. The Indians were going down to it, and Matas told me they were going to fish. Heavyhearted, wanting for a moment to forget my troubles, I went with them to see how they did it.

About fifteen of the Napos cut poles and pieces of brush, and went about two hundred yards downstream. The others took up positions in the water, upstream and on the other side. When everybody was in position, the downstream crowd suddenly began to raise a terrific hullabaloo. Uttering shrill cries, they beat the river with their poles, while the men with the brush made sweeping motions through the water. They had the entire stream covered, from bank to bank, and yelled hideously as they slowly moved upward. As they neared the upstream crowd, the latter began grabbing in the water and feeling among the boulders. Soon I saw an Indian with an eighteen-inch fish in his hands. He thrust the tail in his mouth and stooped down to catch another fish, apparently oblivious to the flappings of the one that he was gripping with his teeth. In a few minutes they were all pulling out fish and throwing them on the banks. It seemed to be no time at all before there were enough for all of us for supper.

After supper we sat on the veranda, chatting quietly for a time. That is, we began to chat quietly, but soon we gave in

to Mendez who was in high spirits again and talked on and on about his intimate relations with the "best people" in Quito, and about his high connections with the government. I could see the agent watching him sleepily as he puffed at a cheroot. Random thoughts flitted through my own mind. Was Mendez putting on an act? The agent was a government employee. Was my fine friend taking this means of warning him that he'd better be good and play Mendez's game?

Carlos began to say something but I stopped him. I knew that a showdown was coming, but I wanted to wait until morning, when Mendez would sleep late and I could have another private conversation with our host.

I was sleepily aware of the night sounds that came out of the jungle, as overtones through Mendez's interminable chattering. Sporadic raucous bird cries floated from here and there out of the forest, which glittered with a thousand flashing, luminous insects. From far away came the deep roar of a troop of howling monkeys. Then, from the lower end of the field, came another sound, savage, ominous and guttural, but not loud. The agent turned his head to listen. "Jaguar," he muttered.

"The Minister of the Interior," Mendez went on. "A very great friend of mine. An old friend of my family's. He is a fine ——"

"It's the first jaguar I've heard for some time," said the agent softly. "Can you smell him?"

Mendez babbled on: "The last time I saw him, he was concerned about the country's Indian policy. Sweeping reforms ——"

A bird cried from a treetop and there was another low rumble from the other end of the field. Perhaps it was imag-

ination, but I thought I could detect the odor of the predatory beast, the odor of the lionhouse in the zoo.

"And then there is the President. I saw him last at the great ball given by ——"

"Maybe he is after my animals, no?" The agent was alert for a moment, but then he settled himself down deeper in his chair, pulling at his cigar and watching the smoke floating out in the night air. Great jungle moths fluttered around the porch and there was a steady buzz of insect noises from the forest and the field. Surprisingly enough, however, we were not bothered by insects.

"It is amazing and fascinating, that social life in Quito. That is where the nation is run, and if one has the proper connections ——"

The words reached my consciousness only dimly. Turbulent thoughts were racing through my mind. Why did this faker and insufferable bore take us on such a wild-goose chase? Why, in heaven's name, was he stupid enough to go along if the whole thing was a pack of lies? The picture simply didn't fit together and I was trying to decide on a plan of action. Should I go on with the expedition? Oh, well, my conversation with the agent in the morning would help a lot.

Carlos arose to go. "If you will pardon me, patrón. I want to go to sleep."

"Good night, Carlos."

"Buenas noches."

"The Minister of the Interior said to me once ——"

Neither the agent nor I was listening. Tired as I was, I was determined to stick it out, and not to leave Mendez alone with the other man. We sat there with our thoughts, listening to the jungle, while Mendez rambled on and on. Finally he ran out of steam about midnight, stopped short in the middle

of a sentence, and excused himself to go to bed. The agent had been too polite to break up the conversation.

"I'm afraid," was Mendez's parting shot as he looked at my half-closed eyes, "that we're keeping our North American friend awake."

I lay awake a long time that night, tossing on my cot and trying to figure things out. One thing was sure—if we went on, Mendez was useless even as a guide. He was only in the way, and I had to contrive, somehow, to send him back to Quito before he caused any more trouble. If we didn't go on, should Carlos and I both go back with him? I had no desire to retrace our route with him. So far he had held himself in check at critical moments; but the man was potentially violent and if we now gave up the whole venture he was likely to be extremely unpleasant, if not downright dangerous. He had no cause to love me. Would he try to do me some physical harm? Had he heard the agent telling me that he had never been over the trail before? Was that the reason for his loquaciousness? What would he do—what should I do—how would the whole thing turn out tomorrow?

It took me a long while to go to sleep. The night was cool with stray breezes that blew over me. Not being bothered with insects I had neglected to put up my mosquito net.

Early the next morning I was awakened by a cry from Carlos. He stood beside my bed, staring at me with startled eyes.

"Patrón, patrón, what happened to you?"

I wiped the sleep from my eyes. "What are you talking about? What's the matter with you? Nothing happened to me."

"Blood! Your face is covered with blood."

"Blood?" I put one hand to my face and was dismayed to



find one side of my neck and face plastered with clotted blood. I sat up with a jerk and saw that my pillow was a gory mess.

"Get me a mirror, Carlos."

I examined myself fearfully. My whole side looked as though I had been weltering in gore. Had Mendez stabbed me during the night? Why didn't I feel it?

I sent Carlos for the medicine chest. Matas came up and watched me impassively as I felt over my head and neck for the wound.

"Well, what the devil do you want? Don't you see I'm hurt?"

"Vampires," he said curtly.

"Vampires? What do you mean, vampires?"

"Vampire bats. They sucked your forehead. One of them opened a vein here." He pointed to my temple. "You should have used your net. Indians wake up when they come."

I heard later, with what truth I don't know, that vampire bats have a habit of fanning their wings while sucking blood from man or animal, and that the resulting wind is the reason why their bite is hardly felt. I felt a trifle lightheaded, but otherwise there were no ill effects.

Carlos brought me my coffee. I saw the agent walking about, but Mendez was nowhere to be seen. It would be another hour before he woke up.

"Señor, may I talk to you for a moment?"

The agent stopped and waited for me to come up.

"I'd like to ask about the trail ahead, the trail to the Napo."

"It's easy. You'll have no trouble. If you start tomorrow morning you'll strike the Napo about noon."

"Does it run east and west?"

"No. North and south. It follows the slope of the Andes

for some distance. You'll have to follow it for a day or so, before it turns toward the east. Then it swings southward, toward Peru and the Amazon. Are you going down the Napo to the Amazon?"

This was the first time he had asked about our plans, but I ignored his question.

"The headwaters of the Napo, señor. Do you know the headwaters?"

"What headwaters? It's made up of a number of confluent streams. Which one do you mean?"

Still reluctant to give up entirely the story of the Inca gold, I phrased my next question carefully. "At the point where we touch the Napo, is there a tributary that comes down from the Andes, flowing eastward, and that has a lake at its head?"

He shook his head, smiling dubiously. "There is not. I have explored this entire country, looking for the source of the gold that comes down the Napo. There is no such tributary and no such lake, I can assure you."

I stood there crestfallen. The agent said, "Señor, I don't know what you are looking for in here, and it's not my business. But you are on the edge of dangerous country. You should be careful of your directions and I don't believe that yours are good. The deep jungle beyond here is dangerous, and"—he waved his arm—"not far in that direction is the country of the head-hunters. You should know what you're getting into."

"Yes," I said rather sadly. "I should have known before I started." Reluctant to tell my woes and admit my errors to a stranger, I fastened on one thing he had said. "So the Napo carries gold?" I asked.

"Yes. The gold comes down in large quantities after a freshet. But I can't find the mother lode. I've explored this

country till I know it like my old home town, but I can't find the source of the gold."

I saw Mendez walking around in the yard, and asked the agent to say nothing to him about our conversation. My mind was made up, at last, to end the expedition here and now. I looked up Matas and had a chat with him about possibilities. Then I asked Carlos to go with me while I tackled Mendez. "He might make trouble," was all I said.

We went up to the Ecuadorean and I came right to the point:

"Mendez, here's where we part."

He jerked himself erect and stared at me. "What do you mean?"

"I mean what I say. We part here. I'm not going on. Carlos and I are going down the Napo River to Peru and you're not going along. You can wait here a few days while Matas's men go to their village for more food. I've arranged for them to take you back to Mera."

He was speechless for a minute. "Just what are you driving at?" he asked me finally.

"I'm driving at telling you that you're a liar. You've never been over this trail in your life; you've never seen that treasure lake, artificial or not; you've handed me a cock-and-bull story from the beginning and I was a fool to fall for it. We're through."

When I first called him a liar to his face he stepped back, his face glaringly angry. He made motions as if to reach for his gun, but Carlos stepped quietly to his side.

Mendez sputtered awhile. He tried, first, to protest his honesty, but I wouldn't listen. Then he admitted that he had never been over the trail. But he begged me not to give up the expedition.

"Don't give it up, I beg you. We've come this far. Why do you think I came along? I'm telling you that map is real. The treasure, the tradition, the Jesuit priest—they're all real. I admit I fooled you, but it was the only way I could have got you interested. Don't give it up now."

"Nonsense. I asked the Indian Agent. It's all poppycock. That map's a complete fake."

"The Indian agent. The Indian agent. What does he know about it? I can tell you that an English engineer went up in there a few years ago and ran into an artificial lake, just as I described it to you. For God's sake, don't give up now."

I turned on my heel. "I've had enough of your stories," I shot back at him. "We're through."

And so ended the search for Inca treasure.

## *Chapter XI*

THERE was a man who came up from Peru to Ecuador to make himself rich, just as I had done. That was four centuries ago and his name was Captain Francisco Orellana. He was lieutenant governor of the city of Santiago when he heard rumors of Ecuador's fabulous cinnamon forests. A stalwart man of action, he dropped everything to sail to Quito and offer his services as an explorer to Gonzalo Pizarro, the governor there. But when he got there he found that Pizarro had already left Quito with a large expedition, to strike eastward and search for the cinnamon forests himself.

Undaunted, Orellana set out to catch up with the other. He had twenty-three men with him, and he had spent forty thousand gold pesos of his own money in outfitting them. He must have taken very much the same route inland that Carlos and Mendez and I had taken—perhaps he traveled over exactly the same old Indian trail. But he had a harder time than we. Beset by hunger and heat, by fevers and hostile Indians who attacked him at every point, he managed only barely to push his way through. When he finally joined the governor's force, perhaps at the precise spot where the Indian agent's house now stands, he had nothing left but his courage and his men.

His friar, companion, and chronicler, Gaspar de Carvajal, wrote of him: "When he overtook the said Gonzalo Pizarro, he still had left only a sword and a shield, and his companions

likewise." Later Orellana was to descend the Napo and discover the Amazon.

Carlos and I were discussing our descent of the Napo. Mountain bred and desert reared, the good Chilean didn't like the tropical jungle country and was willing to go with me only because of his loyalty to me and because he liked Mendez still less than the tropics.

"Don't worry about it," I said. "We're a thousand times better off than the first man who went down that river. He was broke and sick. He was in unknown country and he had a lot of men with him. Indians were shooting at him wherever he went. He had to fight his way through and he had to take time off to build two ships before he could get down the river and discover the Amazon."

"Who was he, patrón?"

"His name was Orellana. He was a conquistador. He came through here in 1541."

Carlos's face was twisted in an expression of distaste. "A conquistador? Like him?" motioning in the vague general direction of Mendez.

"Don't get him wrong, Carlos. This fellow might have been a very brave man about four hundred years ago. His ancestor, the first Mendez who went with Pizarro, was probably a great hero. The only trouble with our friend is that he's trying to be a conquistador after the country is all tame and nice and peaceful. That's just foolish."

Having settled the score with Mendez, I no longer felt antagonism toward him, and was growing tired of Carlos's constant disparaging remarks. But the Indian in my servant would not be downed.

"Señor," he said slowly, "I don't believe that the early conquistadores were such great men. I think they were fools.

If they acted toward the Indians like that fellow there, it isn't any wonder that they had to be brave. It's no wonder the Indians killed them whenever they had a chance. They'd like to kill this fellow Mendez too, right now. You and I don't have any trouble with them, do we?"

I could see that Carlos was working himself up to something, so I let him go on.

"This fellow Orellana. Who was he? You say he was the first man who went down the Napo. Patrón, I don't believe it. My own people, the Indians, went up and down that river for hundreds of years before Orellana was ever born. He had to build a couple of ships, did he? Well, if our precious Señor Mendez were going down, maybe he'd have to build a couple of ships too. Do we have to build them? No. We go to Matas and we say to him, 'Take us down the Napo,' and he says, 'Sure,' and that's all there is to it. That's just because we treat the Indians like human beings. We don't have any trouble, do we? We don't have to hunt the Indians with dogs. No, patrón, don't tell me about the conquistadores being great men. They were beasts and fools the way I look at it and they brought all their troubles on themselves."

This was the first real sign of bitterness I had ever seen in Carlos. I didn't argue with him—all arguments about racial superiority are both dangerous and futile.

The Indian agent gave us a last bit of reassuring advice. "Matas will take care of you," he said. "He's a good man. He will see you through if you follow his advice."

"What about the head-hunters?" I asked.

"Sí, señor; there are savages there. Men who shrink the heads of their slain enemies down to the size of a fist. But I don't believe you will meet them. The Napo River has been a main highway of the white men for centuries. The wild

people generally stay away from it. They live several days' march in from the river, in the dense jungles where they can hunt the monkeys and the birds and the peccaries, and can find plenty of fruits and edible plants. I don't believe you will see them. It has been many years since the savages have been seen on the Napo."

Reassured, I went on with the preparations. We were packed and ready to start by eight o'clock one morning, the Indians lined up and prepared to receive our loads. I said good-bye to the agent but Mendez was nowhere to be seen.

We plunged through the heavy vines and the dense brush of the forest, and early in the afternoon we became aware of an all-pervading roar ahead, subdued at first but growing louder as we neared its source. At two o'clock we arrived at a small clearing. The Napo was beyond, roaring and foaming in a boiling mass of rapids. My heel was bothering me, and we made camp for the night.

The sight of the Napo stirred in me the memory of old sagas, heard and read long ago, and half forgotten. There rankled in my mind, too, the memory of Carlos's digs at my race. I decided to educate him.

"Orellana and Pizarro," I said. "I don't care what anybody thinks; they were valiant men. I don't care how many men they had with them. Too many; too many. They tore the jungles apart for cinnamon but they didn't find any. They hacked their way through and then they came to the Napo. Perhaps just about here. Perhaps at these same rapids. But they were out of food. They were beginning to feel hunger, and they were sick, and their men were sick, and many had died from the privations endured. Strange country, Carlos. Unexplored and terrible. We have it easy today. They came



here and Pizarro decided to send Orellana downstream to search for food. So then they got to work."

Carlos was looking at the campfire, smoking a cigarette. He said nothing.

"They collected all the nails they had, and all the iron for making nails. They gathered their axes and each man was told to go into the forest to cut a number of planks—with savage Indians shooting at him. But they kept on and they built a boat. And then Orellana and Carvajal and some of the men started to sail down this river, with no idea of what lay ahead, looking for food. But there was none. The river was uninhabited. They went day after day and they never knew when they'd be swamped in the rapids, but they went. But then they found that they couldn't turn back. The river was high and there was lots of water, and they couldn't go back upstream. There wasn't anything left for Orellana to do but go down to discover the Amazon."

Carlos flicked his cigarette away.

"You say he was looking for food? With this fellow Pizarro and all his men starving upstream, waiting for him to come back?"

"That was it."

"What'd Pizarro do?"

"He had himself one hell of a time. Finally he managed to get back to Quito. Orellana'd reached the Atlantic by then, and sailed around to Cuba. Pizarro hounded him the rest of his life. He said it was treason. He said that Orellana had deserted him on purpose."

Carlos looked disgusted. "He was right. Orellana should have been put in jail. What did I tell you? Couldn't get back upstream, could he? How did these fellows get upstream to meet us?" indicating our Indians. "They live a ways down the

river from here. They come upstream all the time, don't they? I told you the conquistadores were fools. They were just like that fellow Mendez. If they'd been decent to the Indians ——"

Matas squatted on his haunches, listening to the conversation with a masked, impassive face.

We straggled on for several days overland. Finally we came to Matas's village, about thirty palm-leaf houses near the riverbank, built on stilts to keep them dry at high-water time. A great din arose as we arrived—dozens of children and half-starved dogs spewed out of all the houses. The women began to show themselves too, one by one, as they saw that it was their menfolks arriving.

Our porters dumped our belongings on a bare patch of dry ground, and we squatted there with Matas to arrange terms for transport down the river. First, however, he gave a sharp command to a wizened old hag, who came out with a bowl of chicha. Ceremoniously we passed the slightly acid, invigorating, and mildly alcoholic drink from mouth to mouth, toasting our friendship.

"You like chicha?" Matas asked me.

"Yes. It's good. How is it made?"

"Our women make it." He called to the old crone again and she emerged with a full bowl—a gourd shell—which she placed before me for my personal consumption. I sat and drank it, smacking my lips, all through the ensuing negotiations.

Matas agreed to take Carlos and me to Iquitos in a dugout canoe, for another hundred rounds of ammunition. He had a long traveling canoe, with a palm-thatch roof to shelter our baggage. Eight Indians would paddle it and he would go along as patrón, or coxswain. Again I marveled at the terms, and

agreed to them at once. It would take us the better part of a month to reach Iquitos, and the return trip would take the Indians much longer, fighting their way upstream. We would have to wait a few days, however, while the Indians prepared their provisions. Meanwhile Matas would take us to the home of an Australian settler a few hours downstream, where we could live in comfort.

"Bueno, bueno. We have time. But please take us to the Australian immediately. I'd like to get there tonight." I had no desire to spend a night in Matas's village; it looked none too inviting.

The descent, in two heavy and unwieldy looking boats, was an experience I'll never forget. No sooner had we shot into the stream than we were caught by a raging cataract that I had neither seen nor heard from land. Our canoes tore along surrounded by roaring, foaming waters that threatened to engulf us at every moment. Carlos and I clung desperately to the sides, shouting things to each other that we couldn't hear, fully expecting to be swamped.

"They can't get through. The fools. They can't make it!"

Carlos looked grim and shouted something in return.

The Napos were superb, however. Never have I seen such boatmanship. They stood in the bows of the two boats with long poles, staving us off the rocks and shouting their exhilaration.

"Aya! Aya!" As we bore down on some great boulder that stood out of the swirling waters and promised to wreck us, "Aya!" and some man would poise his pole, touch the rock at the last minute, swerve the boat aside, and shoot us past, to the next boulder, where the next man would turn his deft trick, balancing himself superbly on the edge of the canoe, laughing with glee.

Finally, as suddenly as we had got into the rapids, we shot into calm water. The men laid their poles aside, sat on their benches, and took up the paddles. And then, in a beautiful, ceaseless rhythm, they paddled us down the river, stroke after even stroke, in perfect harmony and with a never-varying beat.

"In his own country, and at his own work," the Indian agent had said, "the Indian is a better man than we whites." I could understand him as I watched the beautiful brown shoulders before me, hunching and rippling with a powerful but easy, machinelike precision.

While it was still daylight we arrived at the home of the Australian settler. It was a large and comfortable abode, set about fifty feet back from the river. Around it was a fine veranda, furnished with chairs and hung with a number of hammocks. The host, a tall chap, widely traveled and well educated, greeted us civilly and bade us make ourselves at home. We spent eight days with him before Matas finally arrived, ready to take us down the river.

I was, of course, interested to know how a man of that kind happened to live in lonely splendor in the Ecuadorean jungles. But whenever I came anywhere near asking the question, he parried me with the skill of a champion fencer. He was affable and hospitable, but he wasn't telling why he had gone off to live in the wilderness. Was there something behind it, something connected with the police? I was never to know. He talked of Australia and Ecuador, of Paris and London and New York, and delightedly we compared notes on scenes we had both known and loved—while the parrots screamed in the treetops overhead and the monkeys peered at us out of the jungle.

The man lived like a minor jungle king. He had several

acres of fertile, cleared land, where he grew sugar cane, tobacco, corn, sweet potatoes, yams, beans, coffee, lemons, oranges, pineapples. He produced locally almost everything he needed except clothing and salt. The Napo Indians did his work for him, on a basis little removed from a kind of benevolent slavery. He supplied them with such goods as knives, firearms, cloth, in return for their work, and he saw to it, in accordance with an old colonial custom, that they were never out of debt to him. His real living came from the gold that the Indians washed out of the river. He took them down to the sand bars to pan it after every freshet. Each Indian could recover almost an eighth of an ounce a day, but only after the freshets when the gold was carried down by the swollen streams and deposited on the bars.

Carlos and I fished, hunted, swam, ate, slept, and let the morrow take care of itself. Our host's table was as excellent as his hospitality was great. His "cellar" was well stocked with good wines and liquors, which had been transported to the house at heaven only knows what cost in labor and money.

One evening we sat on the veranda indulging in a "sundowner" as they call them in Africa, and I commented on the high cost of liquor in those out-of-the-way regions.

"You know," I said, "I've got right fond of chicha. I drank it with my Indians all the way from Mera, and I had some more the other day in their village. It isn't bad for a mild alcoholic drink. I should think you'd have the Indians make it for you here."

He looked intently at me for a moment, a wry smile about his lips.

"Do you really like it?" he asked slowly.

"Yes, I like it a lot. It isn't very clear but it has a peculiar acid taste that I find very refreshing."

The Australian grinned. "Did you ever see them make it?"

"No. I asked Matas how it's made and he only said that the women prepared it."

"Yea-a-ah. The women make it, all right."

"But how? What's the secret? I'm really interested."

"I don't think you'd like it if I told you."

Thoroughly interested, I begged him to tell me the secret. Finally he relented. There was an old woman, a crone with dried breasts and a wrinkled, none-too-clean face, hobbling about out in the yard. He pointed to her:

"See that woman. She's one of those who make it. She and a lot of others. The old women make the stuff." Suddenly he began to laugh, and I felt slightly disconcerted.

"It's the old women like her," he was talking in Spanish and Carlos was all ears. "You come to an Indian village and there they all sit in a circle, making chicha."

"But how? What do they do?"

He laughed again, uproariously. I was beginning to be annoyed.

"I don't think you'll like it so well after I tell you," he said.

"Oh, for heaven's sake, out with it."

"All right. Well, you come to a village, and there all the old hags sit, each with a bowl in front of her, each with a supply of partly cooked mandioca root. She takes a bite, and then sits there, chewing it and chewing it, and then she spits it into the bowl. Then that's chicha. The saliva helps to start the fermentation. Makes it more digestible too. It's very digestible stuff, chicha is."

He went into paroxysms of laughter. Carlos and I looked at each other weakly. The old Indian woman came near the veranda. Carlos took one look at her and went into the house.

During our stay at the Australian's house, I pumped him for all the information I could get out of him about the river.

"I'm just hanging on here," he said. "I'm just waiting for things to improve. Business isn't so good these days."

"Business? Was there ever any business on this river?"

"Why, sure. You go down the river today and you find eight haciendas. Eight, that's all. You should have been here twenty years ago—or even ten. There were eighty plantations along here then, and they all did a good business. That's all gone now. They're giving this river back to the Indians. The white men are pulling out and it's a shame. If this keeps up, the Napo'll be a river of savages again in a few years."

"Business? But what did they do? What was there along here?"

"Listen, did you ever hear of the rubber rush to the Amazon Basin? It was a regular Klondike, I tell you. People flocking in from all over the world—a lot of Alaskan sourdoughs among them too. Rubber was selling at fifty cents or a dollar a pound, and people went crazy through this whole basin, making themselves rich in all the jungles. They went crazy, I tell you. Wait till you see Manáos and see what it used to be when the gold rolled up the Amazon as fast as the rubber flowed down. The Golden City they called it then. All through these parts, farther down the river, one rubber camp after another. They brought in Jamaica Negroes as overseers—especially on the Putumayo River—and they captured wild Indians in the jungles and put them to work tapping the rubber trees. There was life here in those days. There was commerce. There were launches going up and down all the rivers—traders, warehouses, clerks, soldiers to keep order and raise hell. I'm telling you, this was something, and every-

body who had a plantation anywhere around here could get rich selling produce to the rubber camps."

"What happened?" I asked. "What happened then?"

"Lots of things happened. Everything happened. They tapped the rubber trees so badly that a lot of them died. They had to go farther and farther inland to find rubber, and it got to be more and more expensive working it. And the wild Indians finally got wise and moved away; then labor costs went up. And about that time the British and the Dutch started planting rubber in the East, and people here couldn't compete with plantation rubber. So the rubber industry here practically died, and the ranchers and hacendados were left holding the bag. You don't like to move away and give up everything when you've worked hard for years getting a plantation started—and a nice house, like this one."

Today I often think of his words. Today the United States is probably wishing fervently that the rubber industry hadn't moved to the Far East. A lot of problems would be solved if we could again depend on getting a dependable supply of rubber out of the Amazon Basin.

The Australian went on. "So most of the white men and their organization withdrew, and practically gave a lot of these rivers back to the Indians. It was that way on all the Amazonian rivers. And now the wild Indians are beginning to come back. They don't like the white men any better for the rubber boom either. Over there"—he pointed to the dark line of jungle on the other side of the river—"that's where you can find them if you're fool enough to look for them. That's all savage jungle, and it's full of head-hunters."

"Do they ever come over to this side?"

"No. Not yet. It's still safe enough over here."

"Still? What do you mean?"



"I mean that it's a gradual process. In recent years those wild Indians have been seen right down by the riverbank. Maybe it won't be long before they cross it. They're giving this river back to the Indians, I tell you, and it's a shame. It's a wealthy region."

There was something ominous in what the man was telling me and I asked him about my own voyage downstream.

"It'll be all right," he said. "They won't bother you if you leave them alone. They may come to the plantations someday—but a traveler like yourself—it'll be all right."

The man knew his river, but it happened that he was wrong on one point. It wasn't all right.

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## Chapter XII

MATAS came with his long canoe and eight paddlers. We stepped in, poised for a moment, bade good-bye to our Australian host, and then shoved off—the Indians paddling slowly at first but building up their rhythm to the steady, endless pulse of their tireless traveling beat.

At that stage, the stream, which later widened into a mighty river, was only about a hundred feet wide—the water crystal-clear with a dark tinge. The jungles slid past us on both sides, encroaching to the water's edge, blue-green and menacing. Matted lianas were twisted everywhere. Near the ground everything was dank and rotting, in perpetual shadow because the dense foliage overhead kept out the sun. Here and there enormous trees with buttress-roots towered high about the surrounding forests. Hour after hour we proceeded downstream, the Napos stopping their paddling only occasionally, as some man scooped a bowl of water out of the river, mixed it with mandioca, and shoveled the paste into his mouth with his fingers. Matas stood in the stern, steering with a paddle, his eyes alertly forward, uttering occasional curt commands.

Late in the afternoon the waters began to swirl menacingly and the Indians headed for shore. We carried the canoe and the baggage downstream some distance, portaging around a great whirlpool.

There was a large and well-built adobe house just below

the whirlpool and overlooking it. I paid my respects to the owner and found a buxom widow living there alone. Her husband had died some years before but she stayed to carry on his business.

"Señora, isn't it lonesome—here—like this?"

"Ay, Dios! Of course, it's lonesome. But these Indians, they're good people. And the white travelers who come through. Soon I'll have enough so I can return to Quito and live decently like a Christian."

She was engaged in the bootleg business. She had a sugarcane plantation and she distilled the juices into a fiery rum.

"How do you sell it, señora? What do they pay in return?"

"Gold, of course. They bring me gold dust and nuggets and I give them aguardiente for it."

"Gold? Where does all this gold come from?"

"They wash it out of the riverbanks after the rains. They can find it in the sand bars. But only above the whirlpool. Below it there is no gold."

So! I inspected the maelstrom with a new interest. Above it there was gold and below it there wasn't. That meant that all the precious metal settled somewhere down there, somewhere in the bottom of the pool. It probably meant that for untold centuries a fabulous horde of gold had been accumulating in some pocket on the river bottom immediately in front of me. It could only mean that there, within my sight, was the location of a treasure that might well have been far greater than the Inca treasure we had come so far to seek. Excited, I called to Carlos.

"Come along, Carlos. I want to look over the ground a bit."

I told the good Chilean about it and he grew even more elated than I.

"How will we get it? How will we get it? Nobody can dive down into those waters."

"Whoa. Not so fast. See that tongue of land over there? That's where we'll have to build a canal to bypass the river. It's not so hard. Straight across that tongue, and then we'll lay the whirlpool dry. Then we can get down to dig up the gold."

He stared, and his face fell. "A canal, patrón? Me? We and these Indians? How will we do it?"

I laughed. "No, not now. We'll come back here someday. We'll come back with money and tools and laborers. This job is worth doing right."

"O-o-oh! No, patrón," slowly. "Perhaps you will come back, but not I. Not to this country. You can have the gold and the mosquitoes and the jungles and the heat. But I don't believe you are coming back either."

Perhaps he was right. I dream of that whirlpool today, and I dream of going back. But I dream of the silver mine in the Andes too, and of Mendez's Inca treasure, and of half a dozen other things. That is South America. A man who has lived there and felt the tempo always dreams of going back. To what? It doesn't matter. To the untold and untouched riches that may be still found on the ground and under it; to the life of easy freedom that is so often miscalled hardship; to the human relationships, the Carlos Martinez's; to the constant gossip about things political, social, economic, in twenty countries that are still young enough in spirit not to take themselves too seriously. To South America.

We took our leave of the widow and resumed our journey.

The Napo was gradually increasing in width, but the vegetation on the banks became denser. Great, spindly palms

towered up on both sides, together with gigantic hardwood trees of a species new to me. They formed a veritable living canyon of green, so high that most of the day we traveled in shady gloom, punctuated by sharp strips of light where occasional breaks in the forest let through a brilliant burst from the glaring tropical sun. The air had the humid stuffiness of a glassed-in botanical garden.

It was impossible to land anywhere because of the dense, matted vegetation. We could not even pull up to shore without hacking with our machetes through the vines and heavy lianas that twisted themselves obscenely among the ferns and the underbrush. The steamy atmosphere was redolent with jungle odors, weedy and dank, with sometimes a spot of fragrance as we drifted slowly past brilliant jungle flowers.

From the forest came the steady hum of insects, the most dangerous animals, by far, of the Amazon Basin. Against the snakes and the jaguars a man can protect himself, but not against the diseases and the gnawing ulcers spread by the myriad mosquitoes and little flies. Here and there we heard noisy chattering and the cries of birds. Macaws, egrets and parrots were everywhere. The parrots especially made bright dabs of color as they flew squawking from the trees and across the river, to disappear over the dense tangle on the other side.

Gay-plumaged little birds darted about the jungle's outer walls; several times we heard the snarling roar of jaguars; occasionally we startled peccaries down by the water's edge; monkeys jabbered at us from high limbs overhanging the river, and swung in great, exhilarating arcs from the dangling lianas.

Occasionally a large, potbellied, black-faced monkey stared at us through the foliage. The Napos would set up an excited

chattering and beg me to shoot him, claiming that they made excellent eating. But I couldn't do it. Several times I raised my rifle, but the monkey only stared at me, with so human an expression of slight uneasiness on his face that it seemed like murder.

After the first few days the Indians lost their enthusiasm for paddling. At times they merely drifted for half an hour or so at a time, talking excitedly about some trivial thing they had seen on shore. I didn't care. We were in no hurry to get anywhere, and time had lost its meaning. Space had lost its meaning too. I was in a lethargic dreamworld, encompassed by a riot of chlorophyll, and often I was more annoyed than pleased when the paddlers took up their work again, and the beat of the paddles pulled me out of my drifting doze and back into the world of men and work.

"Matas, are there any Indians living in those forests?"

"Indians? Yes. Many of them. They are bad men. They are savages who live like animals and are not Christians."

So the naked coxswain behind me considered himself a civilized man!

"There are the Záparos, Cotos, Tutapishcos, Auhishiris, Payaguas, Cauranus, and Jivaros. Those are very bad men. Son bien bravos. They kill people. Then there are the Mucegos."

"Mucegos, Matas? Those are bats."

"Sí, señor. These are men like bats. They are farther down, in Brazil. It is very dark where they live, and their eyes are like the eyes of bats. They cannot see when they come into the bright sunlight. They can see only in the gloom and at night."

"Have you ever seen any of those men, Matas?"

"No, I have never seen them. But I have heard about them. Everybody here knows about them."

"Yes, yes. Matas, have you ever heard of very tall Indians, somewhere in here, who are white? They are white like myself, and they have fine hair that comes down to their waists. I hear that they have lots of gold—or used to have."

Matas looked bewildered and shook his head. Carlos interjected:

"If they are white they are not Indians. There are white men and Indians and they are not the same."

"That's all you know about it, Carlos. This fellow Orellana whom I told you about came through here four hundred years ago, and somewhere along here he stopped for the winter to build himself another ship. A brigantine. He was in an Indian village and the Indians treated him well. They brought him food and they gave him cotton and pitch to calk his ship with. Pitch. It must have been rubber. Orellana must have been the first white man to use rubber. He was certainly the first one through here."

"Were the Indians white?" asked Carlos incredulously.

"No. But one day three of those tall white Indians came to call on him. They said that they had come from a chief far downriver. They had lots of gold and they said that their chief had more. Orellana's friar, Carvajal, wrote about them. He was a friar and a good man, and he wouldn't lie. He said that those three white Indians came, but then they went away again, and nobody has ever seen white Indians through here since."

Carlos looked skeptical. "So the man who wrote that was a friar, was he? A cura? H-m-m!"

On the second day after leaving the whirlpool the jungle suddenly gave way to a great clearing, with three houses. The







aerial trolley car in the Andes. In many sections of mountainous Ecuador cars of this kind are used to cross deep gorges.

ground was low, and some two hundred acres had been cleared. Some of this land was planted to corn and sugar and tobacco; most of it was in grass, and pastured a herd of cattle. The houses, pretentious structures with outside stairways, were built high on poles against the encroachments of high water at flood-time, when the occupants could come and go only by canoe. During the rubber-boom, I was told, the owner had been a wealthy man, trader to the rubber-bleeders and a bleeder in his own right, master of hundreds of Indian slaves. Now he was merely "hanging on" in genteel poverty, dreaming about the lavish days gone by, and waiting, like so many others, for their improbable return.

We pulled to shore. The Napos whooped loudly and I called several times. Finally we saw a man emerge from one of the houses and run toward us.

I stepped ashore, but he called to me: "Espere, señor. Wait."

I stopped, puzzled, and he came to within about fifty feet from me.

"I am Antonio Santander," he said, breathing rapidly. "I am delighted to see you, but you must not disembark here. Stay away, señor. Stay away."

"Stay away?" I was bewildered by his insistence.

"Yes. Come no farther." The man seemed to be under a terrific strain. "All my family," he finally said, "and all the servants are down with the black smallpox. You must not risk coming here."

Carlos and the Napos shrank back at the news. But I stepped forward.

"I've been vaccinated. I'm in no danger. Is there anything I can do?"

"Do you have serum?"

"No, I'm sorry, I have no serum. All I have is antiseptics, Epsom salts, quinine, and aspirin."

Insisting that I come no nearer, he asked me to leave some Epsom salts by the river.

"One of my children died yesterday," he said sadly, "and I'm afraid that the baby can't pull through. But if you want to help, I'll be grateful. My sister lives seven hours' journey down the river. She has had smallpox, and she will come to help us. Could you leave immediately and bring word to her?"

"Gladly, señor. Gladly."

It was growing dark when we pushed into the river; Santander's clearing was soon left behind; the jungle walls closed in again, blackly ominous in the gathering gloom.

"Keep going all night, Matas."

"The men are tired."

"No matter. Let them drift with the current if they want to rest. But keep going."

Carlos and I stretched out on the baggage. The Napos took turns at steering and paddling, half of them sleeping. About eight in the morning we arrived at the house of Santander's sister—on the other side of the river. It was built of bamboo and palm thatch, but there was no sign of any human beings.

"Hola! Hola!" We stood on the bank and shouted, but nobody came out.

"Hola, señora!" No answer.

"Carlos, walk up to the house with me." The Napos got out their chicha and prepared breakfast, while Carlos and I went to the house. We could see that the door was wide open. We shouted again, but still there was no sign of life.

We hesitated on the veranda. "Patrón, I don't like it," said Carlos.

"I don't either. Come on."

At the door we stopped abruptly. The house was in chaos. Pots and pans were scattered about. Provisions had been rooted out of the kitchen. Broken bags of flour and beans littered the floor.

Carlos stopped at the door. "I don't want to go in," he said. "Shut up, Carlos. This looks bad. Come along."

We turned into another room. A bed lay upside down. An old-fashioned metal-covered trunk was open. The lid had been battered off and the contents were hanging over the sides. Carlos and I both drew our revolvers—fingers on triggers.

For a moment there was no sound except the muttering of the Indians that came floating up from the river. There was nothing that Carlos and I could say. We stared, gripping our revolvers.

Then, suddenly, came a voice, harsh and guttural. "Buenos dias."

Startled, I jumped—for the voice had come from the rafters overhead. There sat a macaw, a gorgeous bird, with yellow breast and light-blue back and tail. It was preening itself and ruffling its feathers. "Buenos dias," it squawked again.

"Carlos, go and get Matas and the rest."

He was glad to get out; I could see that. I stood and waited with palpitating heart, wondering what had happened. I breathed a sigh of relief when Carlos returned with the Indians.

Matas and his companions scattered quickly over the house, examining everything carefully. Then one said something, stopped, and looked intently at the floor. The rest joined him and stood in a circle, staring down. I looked over their shoul-

ders. There, in the dust on the floor, was the print of a naked foot.

Suddenly all the Napos began to talk at once—excitedly. They glanced uneasily toward the jungle, beyond the back of the house. Matas went to the back door and peered out.

“Head-hunters,” he said to me finally.

For once I was glad that we were well armed. The revolvers and rifles that had seemed so unnecessary when Mendez bought them in Quito were a godsend now. But I forced myself to talk in quiet tones. It wouldn’t do to show fear before my Indians.

“Carlos, go down to the canoe and get the rifles. Don’t forget ammunition.”

When he had gone I said to Matas, “I don’t believe they are head-hunters. They live farther back from the river.”

“They come down once in a while. Lately they’ve been coming more often.”

Carlos came with the rifles. I sent two Indians back to the canoe to guard our line of retreat, just in case the raiding savages were still about. Matas started out the back door. We followed him. The Napos walked warily along the path to the garden and banana patch, sniffing like hunting dogs as they went. At the edge of the banana patch they ran about, looking for footprints in the tall grass. Then I saw Matas point to some urubus, or buzzards, circling overhead. The Indians ran off through the grove.

We came on them on the other side, the bodies of a man and a woman, pinned to the ground with numberless wooden spears. Their faces had been disfigured horribly by the urubus which we had scared away.

Matas grunted. “Not head-hunters,” he said. “Some other

tribe. Jivaros perhaps. They sometimes raid houses and steal what they want."

Nobody felt like talking. I took charge of the situation and we dug a grave. We wrapped the bodies in sheets from the house, covered them, and erected two crude wooden crosses at the spot. All this time we kept looking fearfully at the forest, wondering whether beady eyes were watching us from there, and whether we would be attacked next.

The work done, we returned to the house. We went right through it, down the path, and to the canoe.

"Buenos dias. Buenos dias," the shrill cries floated out after us.

"The macaw."

"Never mind. He's free. Leave him there."

We were anxious to get away, and piled into the canoe.

"Matas, how long to Santander's house?"

"Two and a half days, upstream."

"Never mind. Head downstream. We couldn't help him anyway."

"There's another house five hours down."

We shoved into the swift current in midstream, the Indians paddling for all they were worth. It was with relief that I saw the jungle closing in on the house of death.

Early in the afternoon we reached the house of a middle-aged couple with a grown son and daughter. They asked us in for coffee, but I came to the point immediately.

"I'd advise you to leave here," I said.

They stared at me in amazement. Then I told them the story. They were obviously perturbed.

"Ay, Dios! Ay, Dios mio! We must leave. We must leave immediately. We must all go to help Señor Santander. Poor Señor Santander. Savages. Raiders. Ay, Dios!"

They were going, all four of them. Nobody would stay behind to look after their animals, so they took them along too. They had a dog, a cat, and about twenty chickens. I needed a change in menu and bought ten chickens from them. We helped them load their canoe and then stood on the bank as they pushed off, the parents and their son and daughter, paddling upstream as fast as they could.

## Chapter XIII

IT WAS seven days' travel to the next plantation. We started for it, badly shaken by our recent encounters. Carlos, especially, was affected. "Something terrible's going to happen," he said over and over again, staring dolefully at the jungle sliding past.

"It *has* happened," I answered, not at all convinced.

"I can feel bad luck, patrón. Bad luck comes in threes, always. Something's going to happen to us."

We camped the first night on a thin strip of beach. But not again. The mosquitoes came out in clouds so thick that we choked on them when we opened our mouths. They permeated everything—our food, clothing, nets. There was no escaping their agonizing torture. After that we stayed in the river, curling up in the canoe as it drifted downstream, going ashore only for water and meals.

The voyage was getting on my nerves. Often I imagined savage faces peering at us out of the jungle. Matas's accounts of the wild Indians did little to ease the tension.

"They hunt with bows and arrows, but mostly with cerbatanas."

"Cerbatanas?"

"Blowguns—long wooden tubes, eight feet long. They blow little slivers of wood through them, with poison on one end and tree cotton on the other."

"Can they get much force with a thing of that kind?"

"It's the poison, señor. Curare. They make it out of roots.



They don't need much force. If they just prick a jaguar's hide with it—or a man's either—he is paralyzed almost immediately. Often death is quick. It depends on how strong the poison is, and how fresh."

Carlos was rolling a cigarette, staring at the jungle. He had lost all his old verve.

"They don't make any noise either," he observed. "A little sliver of wood comes flying out of that mess of trees there and you don't hear it or see where it comes from."

Out of the jungle came the constant hum of its natural sounds, so familiar to us by now that we paid no attention to them. The twittering and chirping of little birds was mingled with the shrieks and squawks of parrots and macaws. Occasionally there burst against that background the hideous roars of the howling monkeys—little animals with tremendous larynxes that look like goiters. They howl in unison, and their frightful racket can be heard for miles.

We squatted on the bank, eating supper, when suddenly the jungle noises died down. "What's that?" We sat and stared at each other. The unusual silence was striking and oppressive, like the sudden cessation of traffic hum on a busy street. We stopped eating and listened. Then we could hear a low rumbling from afar, like the murmur of distant thunder.

"Storm coming up?" Apprehensive, I only wanted something to say. Carlos listened intently and shook his head.

The rumble began to take on volume and rhythm, building up in crescendo, coming nearer, and then dying down again—drifting far away. It stopped for an instant and then came from another quarter, came near us, receded, mounted in volume and tempo, slowed down, and finally died.

"Drums," said Matas. "Indians. Maybe head-hunters. They talk."

I took my revolver out of the holster and examined it.

"What do they say? Do you know what they say?"

"I don't know. We better go. Maybe they talk about us. Maybe they've been following us in the jungle."

Nervously, Carlos threw his cigarette into the fire and stood up.

"I don't want any damned slivers of poisoned wood flying out at me. Let's get going."

There was another short, distant rumbling of drums, like an echo of the conversation we had heard before.

"Yes. Let's go. Pack up and get started."

There was no need to hurry the Napos. Soon we were out in the middle of the stream, drifting placidly through the starry night.

Morning came, to break the peaceful cool of the night, but to revive our spirits, too, with daylight.

"Head for shore, Matas. I want coffee."

We coasted along the bank, looking for some small place where the dense jungle, coming down to the water's edge, would allow us to land. There was a low bank, with a tree hanging over it. A trail came down to the river past the tree, probably a watering-trail used by the forest-animals.

"Head for that. Put in there."

The dugout slid up to the bank. I stood in the bow, reaching for a branch to steady myself. But suddenly there was a shout from the Indians, and a Napo pushed the canoe jerkily out from the bank. I lost my balance and fell into the river.

Then it came. The "branch" that I had grabbed, and which had felt a bit scaly, suddenly began to move. It heaved up in great contortions and began to slide along the tree-trunk. The head of a great snake darted up in the tree's foliage,

and came moving menacingly in my direction. My "branch" had been an anaconda, coiled in the tree by the trail, waiting for its prey to come out of the jungles to water.

In a panic I struck out for the canoe, expecting at any moment to feel the coils of the snake about me. But after I had pulled myself into the boat, I saw it crawling away into the bush. I picked up the shotgun and fired at the long undulating body. We were at close range, only a few yards from shore, and the heavy charge tore a great hole in the snake's body, about a foot back of the head.

For a few moments the snake was still. Then the rest of its body fell from the tree into the river and began a terrific thrashing. Great sinuous sections of the anaconda leaped gleaming from the water and lashed back into it with tremendous force, sending up the water in a spray that drenched us and causing the Indians to paddle away as fast as they could. For several minutes the snake struggled like a crazy water wheel. When it finally quieted down, one of the Indians went ashore and drove a knife into its head.

We stretched out the anaconda and skinned it. It was twenty-six feet long, light gray in color, with brown stenciling. Carlos was grinning again.

"That was close, patrón. I told you something was going to happen."

"I suppose you're happy now," I said, disgruntled. He paid no attention.

"It's a pretty skin," he said. "It's something. We go after Inca gold; we walk for days through the jungle with that damned conquistador; we wade through rivers; the mosquitoes almost kill us; we just miss the savages; and what do we get out of it? A snakeskin."

"Nobody asked you to come along. You wanted to, didn't you?"

"When I get to Iquitos—if I get to Iquitos—I'm going home to Chile. No more of this. Copiapó—my girl's still waiting for me there."

Our diet was becoming monotonous. The Napos were annoyed because I had steadfastly refused to shoot monkeys for them, and now they insisted on fish. A narrow, sluggish tributary flowed into the river, and the Indian paddlers headed up it, claiming it was the best place to fish. We paddled for half a mile, as through a miasmic tunnel. Branches, lianas and mosses overhung the entire stream, shutting out the sun and creating a dank, rotting smell underneath.

The Indians settled themselves with hooks and lines. Carlos and I went ashore to stretch our legs, carrying the twelve-gauge shotgun and taking one of the Napos along for a guide. A thin and almost undiscernible trail led from the bank into the jungle. Probably it had been made by tapirs.

The forest was relatively quiet, disturbed only by the murmur of birds, the distant gibbering of monkeys, and the monotonous dripping of moisture from trees and brush. I was absorbed in looking at a pair of gorgeous orchids, Carlos standing close by me, when suddenly, high above our heads, there was a shrill scream. Carlos and I stood dead-still, shaking in our boots. We had not forgotten the drums up the river. But our Napo guide only laughed and pointed up. There, high in the branches of a tall buttress-rooted tree, a hundred feet above the soggy ground, sat a big monkey, looking complacently down at us. His red beard wagged, and he emitted another scream, unconcernedly reaching around to scratch his back as he did so.

Angrily Carlos reached for his revolver, but the monkey stretched himself and scrambled into the dense foliage.

A chorus of discordant squawks started suddenly, straight ahead. "What's that?" Carlos and I were both fervently wishing ourselves in the canoe, in the middle of the river. A howling monkey started off, and then another. And suddenly they stopped and the jungle grew silent again.

Carlos stopped. "Let's go back, patrón."

"Why? Did you see something?"

"No. But I don't like it. Something's going to happen."

The Indian plucked at my sleeve and pointed to a chansu, a brown bird resembling a pheasant. I raised the shotgun but the Indian shook his head.

"Not good to eat."

"There ought to be grouse in here," said Carlos, interested again.

We pushed on, the bright blade of Carlos's machete flashing as he cut the vines that hung everywhere. We came to a little glade, where a patch of bright sunlight illumined the ground. Carlos, who was leading the way, stopped and motioned to me. A bird like a grouse was running across the clearing, almost straight toward us. It saw us but did not stop. I raised the gun and shot it, sending the bird fluttering into the bushes and tall ferns.

The Napo went over to it.

"Something was after it," said Carlos as I reloaded the gun, "or it wouldn't have come straight toward us like that. There's something in the bush over there."

It was hard to imagine anything in there. We three were alone—the only three human beings in an encroaching, encompassing, riotous world of green.

"Perhaps—" I began. Then I heard a quick grunt from

the Napo, followed by a gasp. I turned quickly. An arrow was protruding from his shoulder. He staggered for a moment, and then fell face forward to lie beside the still-twitching bird.

Almost instinctively I jumped behind a tree. "Carlos! Indians! Get behind cover." But Carlos was behind a tree already, darting quick glances toward the shadows on the far side of the glade.

We stood there for interminable minutes. Nothing happened. There was no movement and no breath of life. The cry of a monkey came from far away. Our Napo lay on his face in the glade, the arrow in his shoulder. It dawned on me that, somehow, we had to get him away.

I took a cautious step out to look around. Then there was a sudden, sharp pain in my ankle. I tried to move back to my covered position, but my right foot struck something and I fell. There was a long arrow protruding from my left boot.

I stared at it dumbly, an overpowering feeling of terror coming over me and making me almost oblivious to the pain in my foot. No movement, no sign of life, could be seen in the jungle about us. Groaning, I braced myself with the gun and struggled to my feet. And then I saw it at last. A naked Indian was running to cover, thirty or forty feet away. I saw him stop, wheel, pull back his bowstring, and aim. He wasn't aiming at me—he must have been after Carlos. Quickly I took aim and fired—both barrels almost simultaneously. The roar of the shotgun seemed to tear the jungle apart. Then I saw three or four brown, naked figures run back into the forest. Carlos fired after them with his revolver, but missed. The savage at whom I had fired had

dropped and lay there without moving. I shall never know if I killed him or not.

Again there was a moment of the ominous, oppressive silence, when the jungle's green walls seemed to be closing in on us. The pain in my foot, momentarily forgotten, became overpowering. My head swam; I felt nauseous; I eased myself down to a sitting position.

Carlos came crawling toward me, revolver in hand. Was he wounded? No, he was only being cautious. He whispered hoarsely:

"Did you see them, patrón?"

"Yes; I got one. I suppose they'll be back." My entire left leg was heavy and numb, and sharp daggers of almost unbearable pain shot up my side and into my head. Writhing and groaning, I managed to hold my foot out to Carlos.

"Chop that arrow off."

Without a word he lifted my foot against the tree, swung his machete, and cut off most of the arrow with one stroke, leaving about four inches. The arrow had penetrated between the bone and the Achilles' tendon. Carlos helped me to my feet and I found I could limp—at the cost of excruciating pain.

Staring apprehensively at the jungle beyond the clearing, we went over to the Napo. To our relief, he was not dead. He was struggling to sit up. Little blood was coming from his wound. The arrow had gone through the shoulder just below the collarbone, and the wound did not look serious.

"Don't touch the arrow here," I said. "He'll start to bleed if we do. We'll take it out in the boat."

Half dragging the Indian, we started for the creek. My leg was swelling rapidly and growing stiff. Perspiration ran down my body in rivulets and I was racked with nausea.

My feet caught repeatedly in the brush and the vines, and several times I fell to my hands and knees. I wanted to stay down and faint, but I had visions of the savages returning. The thought of arrows flying out of the forest again forced me to tense my nerves and drag my aching muscles, swearing a blue streak that often merged into an almost incoherent babble.

When I reached the stream, the Napo was lying on the ground, collapsed from the exertion. Carlos stood on the bank, staring out with a look of indignation and blank amazement on his face.

*The canoe was gone.* Its marks were on the bank, but Matas and his men had disappeared with the boat.

Carlos and I stared at each other. "They're gone." "Sí, patrón." "They've deserted us." "They've deserted us." "The swine—the confounded, treacherous——"

Then Carlos cut loose with such a string of indignant oaths as only a Chilean peon can achieve. He called them everything foul between heaven and earth. He called attention to their maternity, their paternity, and their confounded illegitimacy in general; he called them savages who got their morals from dogs; he called them ——

"Sh-h-h, Carlos. You'll have the head-hunters back here. Shut up."

I went down to the water's edge and looked downstream toward the main river. There I had a glimpse of the dugout, almost a quarter of a mile away, Matas standing in the stern and the others paddling furiously.

I shouted and hallooed, but it did no good. And then I was seized by an almost ungovernable anger. If I had had my rifle I would probably have shot Matas, but they were out



of range for the shotgun. I shouted again but they paid no attention.

I threw the shotgun away, tore off my shirt and helmet, and dove into the water. It felt cool and refreshing, but a spasm of pain surged through me as the water touched my wounded leg. Then, in a moment, the pain passed, and with it the nausea.

I had jumped without stopping to reason, but now I struck out, swimming with frenzied strokes and occasionally raising my head out of water to shout. At last I had Matas's attention. The Napos stopped paddling and idled in the stream, waiting for me. They made no move to paddle back toward me. I shouted almost constantly, but they just sat there and waited.

I had forgotten my wounded foot, until my right foot struck the stub of the arrow. The sudden, sharp pain made me choke and gasp, and lose several strokes.

"Matas, Matas. Come here and get me."

The Indians were immobile in the canoe, looking at me.

How long I swam I don't know. But finally, when I was stopping from sheer exhaustion, I saw the gunwales of the canoe near me. I swam up to the boat and climbed in—and suddenly I didn't care if we were deserted or not. An overpowering lethargy seized me as I lay in the bottom of the dugout. I wanted nothing but to rest—to sleep. The Indians still stared at me, making no motion to paddle.

"Matas," weakly, "go back and get Carlos and your Indian."

He made no move. Talking, giving orders, was suddenly a tremendous effort. I was still for a moment, gathering my strength for another try.

"Turn around, Matas. Go back."



The ancient capital of the Incas is built on a mountain-circled plateau, as is at



He stood there, slowly shaking his head.

And then, finally, I knew I had to act, no matter what the effort cost me. Deliberately I reached for my rifle, threw the bolt, and shot a cartridge into the chamber.

"Matas, you swine! If you don't start paddling back right now ——"

With that he spoke to the paddlers and they set to work at once, turning the dugout.

But I couldn't hurry them. I had fearful visions of the savages returning to kill Carlos and the Napo, but all my exhortations failed to speed the slow, steady pace of the paddlers as they leisurely made their way upstream.

I fired the rifle into the air to scare away any savages who might still be prowling. Matas and the paddlers jumped at the report, and we lost several strokes.

I worked myself into a frenzy, firing cartridge after cartridge until the magazine was empty, then reloading and firing again. The reports echoed from the forest walls, and seemed actually to be ripping through the material substance of the hot and steamy atmosphere.

At last we reached the bank, after what had seemed hours. Carlos lifted the wounded Napo into the dugout and climbed in after him. And then, suddenly, the paddlers bent their backs with a will and shot down the stream, out of its mouth, and onto the sunny surface of the main river.

I ripped my boot open, but the barbs on the arrow made it impossible to pull it out again. Matas took hold of the pointed end and managed to pull it through, after a terrible amount of pulling and twisting. I poured iodine into the wound. It ran out on the other side and I almost fainted from the pain.

But evidently the arrow had not been poisoned. Eventually, after many weeks, the wound healed clean.

Somehow Matas got the arrow out of the Indian's shoulder.

We traveled steadily for two days without stopping, paddling, drifting, the boatmen taking turns at their work and catching catnaps on their benches. About midnight after the first day, my leg set up an almost unbearable throbbing. No matter how I shifted, it sent sharp pangs of pain through my body with every heart-beat. I asked Carlos to light the Primus stove and heat water for Epsom salt compresses. He worked indefatigably all the rest of the way, changing cloths and laying the fresh, hot compresses on my wounded leg and the Napo's wounded shoulder.

My leg began to swell and was soon the size of an elephant's. The Napo, however, just lay there. He didn't seem to be seriously wounded, but just lay apathetically, staring at the sky, making no sound—in contrast to my constant groaning. He stared at the sky, and nothing could rouse him. We offered him food and water, but he paid no attention. He was like a man already dead—except that his heart still beat and he still breathed, and still had his eyes open. He was like a man stupefied by the thought that he hadn't yet died, like a man who was willing himself to die. No sound, no movement, no indication of pain. Just inert—waiting.

Early the second day we reached the home of Señor Francisco Pizarro, at the mouth of the Rio Napo.

We had found a haven of rest. We had returned to civilization, to beds with clean sheets, to tall glasses with ice in them.

"Aquí tiene su casa," said Señor Pizarro, and bade us stay as long as we liked.

## Chapter XIV

SEÑOR PIZARRO was in the lumber-business at the mouth of the Napo, near the Peruvian city of Iquitos. Upstream Indians floated precious logs to his mill for sale—his own workers scoured the forests for suitable timber, brought it in, worked it, transported it up the Amazon to the Iquitos market. It was a small, personalized business that brought this one family a comfortable living, but it was not in any sense “lumbering” as we know it today.

Much has been said about the potential wealth of the Amazon Basin in timber-products. Much of it is true, and most of it nonsense under present conditions. There *is* an untold wealth in commercial trees in those limitless forests—thousands on thousands—millions of them, fine, precious woods, mahogany, teak, and other more beautiful woods that we don't even know yet and that only require exploitation. There are precious woods and common ones, luxury woods fit for an emperor's furniture, and millions on millions of board feet of woods that could serve well for commercial construction. There are fragrant woods, heavy ones that sink when they slide into the water, light ones that seem to float even on air, insect-resisting woods—almost anything and everything one wants. And yet their exploitation is not commercially feasible, for exactly the same reason that the exploitation of Amazonian rubber and quinine is not commercially feasible today. They are scattered over millions of square miles of often-inaccessible territory.

Only a few individuals, like my host Pizarro, fortunate in their locations and working on a small scale, can make anything like a commercial go of timber-production in Amazonia. The forests are too varied, the "useful" trees too scattered. For every tree that has a market value, there are ten thousand, a hundred thousand, that have none. One must scout too far—transportation is too difficult and costly.

So, again, the curse of Amazonas is its arrogant and vulgar display of variegated wealth. Fortunes were made in the haphazard gathering of Peruvian Bark, until the Dutch planted cinchona trees in the Far East and put the wild Peruvian quinine out of business for the simple reason that the cultivated trees were all together where they could be worked at less cost. Fortunes were made in wild South American rubber, until the British and the Dutch planted rubber in the East. There has been no great rush for timber to the world's greatest forest-regions for the simple reason that elsewhere there are other, poorer, timber-regions that are more uniform and permit easier commercial exploitation.

Señor Pizarro and his splendid wife, his children and his chief accountant, lived in a charming and almost luxurious home on the edge of the primeval jungle, and talked to their unexpected guest about Paris and London and New York. They were a highly cultured family who had traveled everywhere, meeting people, collecting books and art-treasures to display against the rich mahogany paneling in their home.

They talked to me when my wound permitted it, and they were unrelenting in their constant attentions to me and to the wounded Indian. For the latter, however, they could do nothing. He did not permit it. He tolerated everything that was done for him, but accepted nothing. Nobody could in-

duce him to eat, or persuade him that his wound was not serious. He had expected to die, and die he did, eventually.

For me there was a whole succession of amateur cures. La Señora de Pizarro was constantly by my side, placing poultices of some herb on my wounded leg, replacing them when they were cold, replacing them again with poultices of some other herb as the accountant had a better idea, or as her grown-up son heard some rumor from some Indian about still another herb, or leaf, or vine, or liquor brewed from a root, that would be sure to cure me.

Nothing seemed to help. My leg was the household's center of interest, but it grew no better. It remained puffed up, enormously inflamed, tense, and throbbing with excruciating pain.

And then, one day, the accountant came out, examined the leg, poked it, watched the indentation slowly move back into the original pudgy state, and stared at the fevered leg with a worried expression on his face.

"What's the matter?"

"Gangrene."

"Gangrene?"

"I think it is. I think gangrene has set in. Let me call the others."

They had a consultation—the entire Pizarro family and the doleful Carlos. They were in doubt at first, but then they talked themselves into a unanimous verdict. Yes, it was gangrene. There was no time to transport me to Iquitos; they would have to amputate.

I was too weak, and too ignorant, to argue. I groaned and almost welcomed an amputation. Who was going to do it? The accountant would do the job. The accountant knew



about such things. Carlos came forward and offered to help, his face a picture of misery.

I don't remember much about the rest of that day. My brain was whirling and I was aware only vaguely of what went on around me. *I was going to lose a leg; I was going to lose a leg.* That was the one clear thought that kept pounding away in me.

"Listen, if you must cut it off, cut it as far below the knee as you can. I want a stump that I can move."

"Yes, we'll do the best we can."

The accountant and Carlos had collected a saw and a batch of knives.

"You sharpen those knives. Get them as sharp as you can."

The accountant was boiling a great kettle of water for sterilizing things. The saw, the knives, he thought for a moment—oh yes, threads for tying up the veins and arteries and for sewing up the skin.

"Remember now," Carlos told him—where he'd gotten this bit of information I never could guess—"slit the skin farther down and peel it back, and then cut the flesh and the bone farther up, so you have some flaps of skin to sew back over the stump."

The accountant was irritated. "Certainly. Everybody knows that."

I had a sudden thought. "Listen, what anesthetic have you?"

"Anesthetic? We haven't any. We're going to give you a lot of liquor. You'll have to bear it. We'll tie you down first."

So now I'd discover what surgery was like in the days before ether and chloroform.

"Carlos, for God's sake, bring me a drink now. A big stiff one."

"Sí, patrón."

He came back with a tumbler of whiskey and I poured it down. That was better. I needed that. I lay back in my hammock and let it soak in. It began to spread through me like a warm glow. So they were going to cut my foot off. Were they going to do it here in the hammock? That wouldn't—no, the accountant was boiling sheets and putting Carlos to scrubbing a table. Damn clever man, that accountant. Do anything. Handy around the house. Do anything that came along. Cut off people's feet at the drop of a hat —

"Carlos—another drink, damn you."

I believe the fellow likes this job. Show how smart he is. Good man, though. Does his work well. Thinks of things. Just thought of sterilizing a lot of needles, and a pair of pliers to pull them through with. Thinks things out and then goes ahead as if he'd done them all his life.

"Carlos —"

Only one thing wrong with this. Why does it have to be *my* foot? Damn clever fellow—but *my* foot.

"Carlos, you lazy, loafing, good-for-nothing swine. You're a swell chap. You're the best man I ever —"

Clever accountant, that fellow. But why can't he stick to accounting? Why does he have to take my foot? *My* foot? Damn it, what's the matter with *my* foot?

Suddenly it came to me, clear and unmistakable. The foot didn't hurt any longer. I'd been so interested in watching the accountant's preparations through my whiskey-haze that I'd forgotten about the pain. It was gone—or had it just gone down, or was it as strong as ever? Damned if I knew.

Well, what was the difference? If the pain is there and you forget about it, then you don't feel it, and then the pain isn't there at all. That's metaphysics.

"Carlos, you loafer ——"

"Yes, patrón. Immediately. I'm bringing you more whiskey."

"Whiskey? Who said anything about whiskey? Fetch me that accountant."

The accountant came, solicitously. Now was he going to soothe me and tell me that it wouldn't be bad? Nuts.

"Listen," I snapped, "the operation's off."

"Off? But gangrene. It's dangerous. You mustn't ——"

"Sure. But it's my foot, and it doesn't hurt any more. Carlos, another drink. Bring me my revolver. Stand by with a rifle. Carlos, you swine— Listen, señor. Not today. The pain's gone today. I'm getting drunk today. Tomorrow. Tomorrow, if the gangrene's still there, you can saw the foot off. Not today. We'll wait till tomorrow."

"But you can't. You ——"

"Who said I can't? It's my foot and I take the responsibility. Tomorrow maybe. We'll wait and see. I've got a revolver—Carlos, where's that revolver—I'll shoot. I'll shoot any foot that touches—I'll shoot any knife that—anybody with a knife."

The man went away, shaking his head. Eventually I fell into a stupor. When I awoke the next morning, the swelling had gone to my head—it was all swelled up. I lifted it gingerly to look at the bandaged foot. The foot was still there—the accountant hadn't sawed it off after all. Señora de Pizarro came out to change the poultice.

"How does it feel today?"

"It's much better. It hardly hurts today—my head ——"  
She smiled indulgently.

"Poor man. You should have let him cut it yesterday. It will be worse today."

"Cut it? The foot is better, I tell you. It's less painful, and there's no gangrene. Look at it. There never was any gangrene. That was a mistake."

That day there was another family-inspection, and an almost unanimous version that there was no gangrene after all—only the accountant dissenting. And from that day the swelling began to go down, and the wound to heal. Today it is only a scar behind my Achilles tendon, a round brown scar on either side of the foot.

It was with real regret that we finally bade goodbye to the kind and hospitable Pizarros. Señor Pizarro wanted me to wait four or five weeks, and then leave with a load of lumber that he was sending to Iquitos, but we were all restless and I could not expect those people to feed me and all my men for so long.

"Adios. Muchas gracias. Adios." And the paddles bit into the water, and we were off on the last lap of our hunt for Inca treasure.

Iquitos, two thousand miles up the Amazon, metropolis of Eastern Peru, metropolis of the rubber empire on the Upper River, once a city where gold flowed like water, and now run down, poverty-stricken, waiting like everybody and everything around there, for the return of a high price of rubber. Efforts were made to encourage other products, other cash-export crops. The British Consul, who was also a steamship agent, posted large billboards, urging the people to plant cotton and grow coffee. Launches, barges, canoes,

and balsa rafts brought cotton and coffee down from the Upper River for trading and trans-shipment in Iquitos. But that was small potatoes. There was something half-hearted about the city's commercial life. The automobiles belonged mainly to government officials; the steam tramway chugged forlornly around town almost devoid of passengers; people sat in the cafes over their drinks, and talked in glowing tones and with awe in their voices, about the good old days when the Aranas had their rubber empire on the Putumayo, when men came in from all over the world to flock to all the rivers and become rich, when inland-towns like Moyobamba were almost depopulated because their inhabitants came down to the rivers to make their fortunes in black gold—the sap of the rubber-trees.

My string of nearly naked Indians excited no curiosity whatever. The city—a civilized city with automobiles and cafes and movie houses, with a college, with fine clothes and an aristocracy, with radio fans and stamp collectors, with gorgeous army officers in French-style uniforms, with politicians, ruling and aspiring to rule—the civilized city was so close to the jungle that the advent in it of a flock of naked brown savages caused no stir whatever.

I took the Indians into a store and let them choose what they wanted, as addition to their pay. They were delighted. One man took a pair of pants; another selected a wide-brimmed, floppy, lady's hat with a flower-garden on top—he was entranced with it and said it was for himself; still another went off hugging a cheap little toy-train with a clockwork in the engine. I bought them food for their return trip, and they went off—happy.

Somehow, I ran into a German who was a professional butterfly hunter and plant-collector. He had his clientele

among museums and wealthy collectors, in a number of American and European cities.

"How do you work?" I asked him.

"Collecting butterflies? You work it in a businesslike way. I have my Indians all up and down the Amazon Basin, on all the rivers and up here in the highlands, collecting for me. I just make the rounds once or twice a year, and buy what they've caught."

"But how do they do it?"

"I teach them. I go into a new territory, pick out a likely Indian, and teach him the trade. I go out with him in the morning, laying a line of bait. Then we come back in the afternoon and catch the butterflies that the bait has attracted. I leave him a cyanide bottle and teach him to kill and to preserve the insects. The Indians are best. They're very good at the trade."

"Bait? What do you use?"

He laughed. "There are a lot of different opinions on that. Once I used bananas soaked in rum. That's a very good bait when you pin it up on trees. The trouble was that the Indians drank it themselves and let the collecting business go to hell. Now I use manure. It's wonderful. I have this nice little Mackintosh Toffee can and a wooden paddle. You smear manure on the trees with a paddle. It's better bait than rum."

He was interested in my Napos.

"I've been meaning to get up and see those fellows," he said. "I never got around to it. I want to see what they've got."

"What do you mean, what they've got?"

"Drugs. Medicinal plants. I collect those, too. Did you ever hear them talking about '*high-ya-waska*'?"

I hadn't. What was *high-ya-waska*?

"Maybe they don't have it," he said. "Maybe they just didn't talk about it. It's a drug that some of these Indians have. They call it *high-ya-waska* around here. The Huitotos on the Putumayo have one like it, only more powerful. They call it *yage*. They take a vine and boil it up. It's a very powerful narcotic, and a very strange one."

"What is the stuff? What does it do?"

"Don't take my word for it"—he talked with hesitation. "You hear strange stories about these Indians, and sometimes they're true, and sometimes not. But this *yage*—a Colombian chemist got hold of some of it once, and isolated the alkaloid. He called it *telepatina*. He swears it works. Then there was a botanist from the Brussels Botanical Garden—came over here and collected *yage* from the Huitotos. He swears it works too. There is scientific literature out about it."

"But what is it? What does it do?"

"They say it does it, but I don't know of course. I'll believe anything, though. *Telepatina*—it puts you to sleep, and then they say you have telepathic visions while you're under. Mental telepathy. You see things that go on somewhere else. Like the Benedictine monks who went up the Putumayo to convert the Huitotos. They were from France. Straight over from Paris. And the Huitotos were so glad to have white visitors staying with them that they celebrated by going on a *yage* drunk. And then they came out and described Notre Dame Cathedral to the priests. Things like that, I mean. Telepathy. I'm looking for the plant. The Indians around here have something like it. They call it *high-ya-waska*. Maybe it's the same as *yage*, and maybe not. I want to find out. I'm looking for the stuff."

Baffled and skeptical, I went about my business. But many months later I ran into *high-ya-waska* myself. When I

checked up, I found it was perfectly true about the Colombian chemist, and *yage*, and *telepatina*, and the claims for telepathic visions.

Carlos was homesick.

"I want to go back, patrón. I have asked the way. I want to return over the Piches trail to Lima, and then from Callao to Chile."

"Stay with me, Carlos. I'm going down the Amazon. I don't know where I'll end up, but I'm going to the coast. Stay with me. I want you along."

He was sad about parting.

"No. This is bad country. I belong in the mountains and the desert. I have enough of these jungles. This is poisonous. I have enough of these savages."

"The Brazilians aren't savages, Carlos. We'll go down the river on a fine steamer. We'll go to cities, to Pará, and to Rio de Janeiro. Come along with me. You've been a good friend."

"No, patrón. I want to go home. I have my girl waiting for me there. It's time—it's time I found myself a finca and settled down." Then, after a short and heavy silence. "If you stay in the cities, and want me there, send for me. I'll come if I can. But not on any more jungle-trips. I know you, patrón. You'll stay in a city just so long. And then you will hear about something on some jungle-river, and you will go again, looking for something. I know you."

Tired, I protested that I was through with jungle-rivers. But it turned out later that Carlos knew me too well.

I bade him goodbye with a heavy heart. He started for the mountains and the west coast. A day or two later, my steamer came, discharged her cargo, loaded, and was ready to take me down the Amazon.



## Chapter XV

WHILE descending the Napo I had once said something to Matas about New York. Puzzled, he had asked: "On what part of the river is that?"

On what part of the river? *The river*, of course, was the Amazon, the center of the world for thousands of people, to whom it was so mighty that there could be nothing beyond. In the months to follow I was to hear it again and again, from Indians and caboclos (Brazilian half-breeds and Indian peons). The big steamers of the Booth Line came from a place called England, which was in Brazil, somewhere near the mouth of the river, near the well-known city of Pará. There was also a place called the United States, where the Yanquis came from. That was a very wealthy country, somewhere in the northern part of the Amazon's watershed. Perhaps it was in the Guiana highlands, where everybody knew there was much gold, where El Dorado had once existed.

The clean and airy steamer *Victoria*, veteran of many a turbulent and rich year of Amazonian trading, slides down the yellow mud-thick waters; the jungled banks slide up—far away, sometimes so far that they seem like mere misty streaks on the horizon, and one can well imagine that the Amazon *is* the center of the universe. The earliest Spaniards called it "Mar Dulce," the Sweet Sea. The "jugular vein of a continent," carrying as much water as the Nile, the Hoang Ho, and the Mississippi combined, it is so mighty that one

name does not suffice for it. The lower third only is the Amazon. The middle third is called the Solimões, and the upper third the Marañon.

It is the one main highway for a fabled, mysterious, and incredibly wealthy area the size of the United States. It is the center of that area, the center of its life, and so the center of the universe to the thousands living in it.

The *Victoria* stopped at every hamlet and village on the way, run-down little places that had once been proud towns but now proclaimed the region's commercial decline—with abandoned and collapsing houses, with paint and plaster peeling off all the remaining structures, with jungle that encroached more and more on streets and habitations. The *Victoria* nosed in to discharge a passenger here and take on another there, to drop a bundle of mail, sometimes to load Brazil nuts or kicking steers hoisted aboard with slings tied around their horns. Sometimes she was flagged in midstream by a man in a dugout canoe with Indian paddlers; at night people would stop her by waving torches or lanterns. Every day she stopped for an hour or two at some refueling station, taking on wood brought aboard by an endless procession of sweating and laughing men.

But the settlements and the fueling stations seemed strangely out of place. Always, mile after mile, hour after hour, day after day, there was that line of primeval forest sliding past us, that enormous forest of continental proportions that has hardly been explored as yet, the forest that belonged to the jaguars and the pythons and the painted savages, and in which white civilization was still an intruder, having only a precarious foothold.

Orellana discovered the Amazon a hundred years before the Pilgrims landed on Plymouth Rock, and today, four

hundred years after the advent of the first white men, its basin is still a turbulent frontier, wild, untamed, unsettled, mysterious, unknown—and so immensely wealthy that it staggers the imagination. Fine, clean, modern steamers ply the rivers for the Amazon Steam Navigation Company; oceangoing steamers come from England and the United States and sail for two thousand miles up the Sweet Sea; today airplanes fly up and down the river; there are modern cities along it—Iquitos at the head of navigation, Manáos at the center—clean cities, healthy ones, with automobiles and streetcars, with modern stores and theaters and cafés; there are great mansions along the river, reminders of the enormous fortunes that have been made there under the impact of civilization; and yet all that is puny. It is a mere nothing, a mere scratch on a primeval wilderness, dank and mysterious and riotously green, millions of square miles in extent.

They say that the Amazon Basin has been explored. It hasn't. Most of the rivers have been traversed and mapped—after a fashion—though some are still shown in dotted lines on even the most modern maps, and doubtlessly others—perhaps as big as the Hudson—have never been seen by white men and are shown on no map at all. And between the rivers? Vast empires of terra incognita, wild stretches of land that no white men have ever seen, and where even the Indians aren't overlords. They are often stretches where man, while he lives there, is certainly not top dog. They are stretches where the insects and the vegetation—rank, poisonous, all-encompassing—are top dog, where man takes his proper place with the other predatory animals, hunting them and being hunted in turn, where man and all the other mammals are hounded and pursued relentlessly by myriad ferocious insects and by a sea of green chlorophyll, from which

the monkeys show their faces in the treetops to laugh at the puny humans below.

Passengers were few on the *Victoria*, and the officers, polite, precise, clad in scrubbed and bleached blue denim coats that were always buttoned to the throat for propriety's sake, bemoaned the passing of the old rubber days, when there was life, and wealth, and trade on the river.

"This was a ship then," one of them told me. "You should have seen the old *Victoria* in those days. All the staterooms crowded, hammocks everywhere in third class 'tween-decks, cargoes of rubber going down, cargoes of food and goods going up, a band playing, champagne flowing. This—" he waved his hand at the almost-empty ship "—everything is dead today. Rubber is almost dead. There are Brazil nuts, a few cattle, a few mahogany logs, a passenger or two—and nobody pays his bills. The Estado do Amazonas is dying. The world's richest region —"

"What happened, senhor? What happened?"

"It was the English. They stole our rubber. They smuggled cuttings of our rubber out of Amazonas and they planted them in the East. Our wild rubber can't compete with their plantation product. They killed us, and now they will kill us in Brazil nuts. The English or the Dutch, or the Americans—somebody will plant Brazil nuts on great plantations where the nuts fall from the trees into railroad cars. The Dutch stole our quinine with plantations in the East, the English stole our rubber, and now somebody will steal the castanhas, and then where will we be? The Brazil nut is almost all we have left here today—all that amounts to anything."

"Why don't you plant them yourselves, senhor?"

"We should, but we don't. Do you see that tree there?"—he pointed to an enormous tree, towering high above the

rest. "That is a castanha tree. See how big it is. How long would it take a man to plant one and wait for it to bear fruit? Our people say, 'Why should we plant them? We have them growing wild. We can send our Indians and caboclos into the jungle to pick nuts off the ground. Why should we plant them and then spend our lives waiting for them to bear?' They say that, but in the meantime other people elsewhere are planting them, and someday we will lose that industry also."

Occasionally the *Victoria* stopped in midstream, to load ton after ton of Brazil nuts, brought out on barges and shoveled into baskets by men—like so much coal.

There was a passenger on the *Victoria*, a tall, bronzed man with a half-sardonic smile, who watched everything, listened to everything, said little, and seemed to be constantly amused. During the first day out of Iquitos he was the ship's mystery man, but one does not remain a mystery long on an Amazon River steamer.

"He is a rubber scout," one of the officers told me. "One of our real explorers. For years he has roamed in there, in the jungles, looking for rubber and balata and Brazil nuts. He knows the interior. On the Putumayo they used to call him 'La Brujula'—the compass—because of his uncanny skill in finding his way around in the densest forests. He knows his way about in there; he knows the Indians—the savages and the tame Indians; he has fought those Indians and he has lived with them; he has made friends with them, and civilized them, and brought them out to work the rubber that he found."

The man interested me. "Will you introduce me to him, senhor?"

A quizzical smile played about the lips of the officer. "Gladly. But I doubt if you will like him."

"Why not? Why shouldn't I like him?"

The officer talked slowly, as though choosing his words.

"It is something that is hard to make clear to you North Americans—or to Englishmen. You will forgive me—it is a difference in temperament. You people—you go up and down these rivers—forgive me—and you call yourselves explorers. I have read your books and I have read newspaper articles. You go over the Piches trail from Iquitos to Lima, or you go up or down the Xingu River in a canoe, or up or down the Rio Negro in a launch, and you write books about how terrible and how difficult everything is. You call that exploration. You call it adventure. Listen, *senhor*, what does a man like that one think about all that? For three or four hundred years our people have been making those journeys—those same journeys—with their women and children, with their mail and their cargoes.

"Those rivers are our highways. They are to us what your automobile roads and your railroads are to you. And you romantic North Americans go roaming up and down them and you write books about your discomforts there, and the illnesses, and the dirt—and only too often you tell lies about how inhospitable our people are.

"That man there—he goes constantly into the unexplored and wild and dangerous interior. He goes with no great expedition. He goes with a machete and a rifle and a few cans of sardines. What does he think of your American travelers who call themselves explorers? He has been in this business all his life and he has seen some of your people. He saw our Colonel Rondon take your Colonel Roosevelt down the river that is now called the Rio Roosevelt; he saw your Dr.

Hamilton Rice take his expedition up the Rio Branco—the time the great German scientist Koch-Gruenberg died there; he saw how Colonel Fawcett worked and he saw the men who said they were searching for Fawcett—your American, Dyott, was one of them. A man like him—I tell you he can't understand all that. You must forgive him; I don't believe he likes Americans."

But the explorer, when I met him, proved to be not a bad chap at all. He was willing to talk about the glories and the wealth of Amazonia's interior, but he seemed amused by my eager questioning.

"Senhor, it is work. It is work like anything else. A man knows his work and he is safe, and nothing much happens to him. He doesn't know it, and he is never safe."

We reached Manáos, the erstwhile Golden City of the Amazon, a thousand miles downstream from Iquitos, now a little run-down, with forty thousand people hanging on in shabby-genteel poverty, waiting and hoping for the return of their glory, for a rise in the price of rubber that would move the Amazon Basin back into its place in the sun.

Again we pushed out into the river, growing ever wider, and went on down toward Pará. Now a subtle change was visible along the banks. Towns were more frequent, less dilapidated. Where, above Manáos, there had been only dense jungle, interspersed by occasional settlements, we now saw a number of great plantations along the shore. The *Victoria* began to load tobacco and sugar and cacao beans as well as cattle and Brazil nuts.

We came to one town—I forget the name of it. The rubber scout pointed to it.

"There is a town," he said, "that you North Americans can be proud of."

"We North Americans? Why?"

"Look at it. It is cleaner than any other town near here. It is neater. It has more flowers growing in it to make life pleasant. Its people are more industrious. And all because of one American who started life as an adventurer and had the good sense to learn better."

He said the word "adventurer" almost with contempt.

"I knew him well. He died not so long ago. He was a very old man. His name was Stone. He was over ninety when he died. Everybody here respected him because he was a good North American."

"What do you call a good North American?"

The man smiled at me, tolerantly.

"You Yanquis. You are always after adventure. Senhor Stone was after it too, and at last he found it. The only adventure that is worth anything. Right there, in that town, raising tobacco and cacao, teaching the people to raise them, setting them an example in decent Christian living, keeping his own house clean and neat and friendly, and planting flowers around, and being content."

I had been telling the man a little about my adventures on the Napo, and about the gold that must be up there, by the whirlpool. He had smiled and said nothing. This talk, I felt, this talk about some old countryman of mine, was his indirect rebuke to me. Often I felt uncomfortable in his presence, and yet I was fascinated by him.

"O, Senhor Stone," he said. "He told me his story—often. He was a young man in the United States, a young man with hot blood. He heard about gold in California and he crossed your continent in search of it. Always in search of easy gold, the way you young men will. He told me that there were



no railroads there in those days and he crossed your continent on horseback, with Indians shooting at him.

"But he arrived there too late. How do I know how it was too late? Perhaps the gold was all gone; perhaps there were too many people there already, looking for it; perhaps the big corporations had already taken it all over. That happens here too, in rubber as well as gold. At any rate, when he arrived in California, there wasn't any gold for him. Mind you, there may have been plenty; there may have been millions and millions of dollars in gold there. But it wasn't for him. He used to say that to me—often. He believed in fate and he accepted fate. Often he said, 'It isn't a question of whether there is gold or not. It's a question of whether it's *for* you. And if it isn't for you, you might as well go home. Somebody else will get it.'"

"That's only too true," I said, thinking of the mine in Chile, and Mendez's Inca treasure, and the whirlpool on the Napo. "That's true. But how will you know whether it's for you or not if you don't go there to look?"

He laughed. "Mr. Stone went, all right. He went all over the world. When he found it wasn't for him in California, he went off to Australia. There was a gold rush on in Australia and Mr. Stone went sailing over there together with thousands of others. But he told me later that the Australian gold fields had been largely invented in California to get rid of unemployed gold miners like himself."

"There *was* gold in Australia," I protested.

"Certainly there was. But the Californians didn't keep quiet about it, and they advertised it to the four winds. That way they got rid of a lot of people who'd come too late for their own gold rush and didn't have anything to eat."

The man's cynicism intrigued me. He waved his arm over the ship's side—toward the north.

"That's happened before. It happened right in here, many centuries ago. Up there in the Guianas. Your friend Orellana, about whom you speak so often, he heard from Indians that up there in the highlands lived a great Indian king, in a city called Manoa. El Dorado—and gold in the streets—and everything lovely." The man laughed. "The Indians knew the trick too, I believe. They had these unemployed white men on their hands, these children of the sun who came from heaven. Tell me, what in hell should a lot of Indians do with two shiploads of Spanish adventurers, coming through here to rape and plunder the savages—even if they *were* gods come down from heaven? These savages aren't fools. What did they do? The white men kept asking questions about gold, and so the Indians told them about it. Always up there, always far away, so the white gods would go away again and leave the poor savages in peace. That's how El Dorado began. I know these Indians.

"And then Orellana—he didn't go up there after the gold. He was busy enough, discovering the Amazon, though it's hard to imagine how he could have missed it. He sailed down to the Atlantic and then to Cuba, and then to Spain, and he told stories about what he had found and heard on this river. And you can believe that he didn't tone them down any. Pizarro was after his hide for his 'treason,' and Orellana told plenty of stories about the women who fought like men and about the gold up in there, just to make himself out as great an explorer as he could."

The man leaned over the rail, smoking his cigarette.

"So that," he went on, "is how we had the first gold rush down here. There were too many Spaniards living in Peru

in those days. Too many had come over after the first conquest, and there they were, unemployed, loafing in the streets, robbing and murdering. The governor didn't like that. Maybe he wanted to do the robbing and murdering himself. He didn't want too much competition. So he started a lot of stories going around about Orellana's gold stories, about El Dorado and all that kind of thing. And thousands of Peruvians came over the mountains and down the Amazon to make themselves rich in the Guianas. So then there was less unemployment in Peru. It's an old trick, I tell you."

Somehow, the man revived me after my many disappointments. There was something refreshing about his candor, and even his callousness tended to restore the lust for adventure in my veins. I had been wondering what I would do next. Should I return to the United States? Should I find a job in Pará or Rio de Janeiro? As my informant talked, I became more and more convinced that I would do neither. There was still adventure to be found, and I was footloose. So why not ——?

"I was talking about Old Man Stone. He arrived in Australia too late, too. There might have been gold there, but it wasn't *for* him. He was stranded in Australia and then he heard about Peru. He no sooner discovered that he couldn't make a go of things in Australia than he heard that there was a gold rush on in Peru. A great gold rush, he told me. Men were getting rich overnight. Gold in the streets, gold in all the rivers. The old Inca mines had been discovered, Inca treasure—you know how it goes.

"It was a wonderful gold rush, I tell you. But that one was certainly invented in Australia. Mr. Stone's blood was hot and he went to Peru. He told me that the Australian government even helped him get there—helped him with cheap

fares to go to Peru and mine the gold there. And still he didn't smell anything. He went, and then he arrived in Lima, and then he was 'on the beach' as he used to say to me, laughing aloud so the whole town could hear.

"That's the story, *senhor*. Mr. Stone went on one more gold rush. He came from Lima over the Andes because, as everybody still knows, the gold is thick on this side of the mountains. Only it wasn't. He didn't find any. And then 'to hell with it' as he used to say to me. There was more gold in tobacco and in cacao than in all these rivers. So he came to this town and he became a Brazilian, and one of our best citizens, and—look. Look for yourself what he did for the town."

I forget the name of the town. We were there only an hour or so, and I didn't go ashore.

I tried often to get my friend to talk about his own adventures in the interior, but he only smiled. He told me plenty about the nature of the country, about its riches, its beauties, about the savage Indians. But when it came to adventure—"Adventures?" he would say. "It's all work, like writing books or planting cacao. I don't know what the word means. Englishmen and Americans come down here to have adventures. Men like Colonel Fawcett."

"You knew Fawcett, didn't you?"

"Certainly I knew him. I knew him when he was on the Bolivian Boundary Commission. He was a good traveler, but I believe he was mad."

"Mad?"

"He was after gold too. Somebody'd told him about a golden city down in there. Like Manoa in the Guianas, but south of the Amazon. Perhaps he'd read an old book about it. I don't know. But he was always after that Golden City. He

kept seeing it in the distance when he was running the Bolivian boundary survey. Out there in the Matto Grosso plains. He'd get excited every day or two and point to the distance, and cry, 'There it is,' like a little boy. But it was always some mesa, some rocky plateau that looked a little like a walled city when it had clouds around it and a man saw it from a distance. 'There it is'—always in the distance—and Fawcett spent his life chasing after it."

"But what happened to him? What do you think of the mystery around his disappearance? Do you believe he is still living in there, kept prisoner by the Indians?"

"Mystery? What mystery? Fawcett had a contract with a newspaper. That is why it's a mystery, and that is why they talk so much about him. Listen! Dozens of men have disappeared in the interior, and nobody bothers about them. Why should we? A man takes his chances, going in there. If he's alive and wants to come out, he will come out. Sometimes he doesn't want to. You go in there and you find white men living with Indian tribes just because they like it. They don't want to come out, and we talk a lot of stuff about their being held prisoner. Perhaps Fawcett *is* held prisoner; perhaps he stays in there because he likes the Indians; but I think he's dead. Long ago."

"Dead. Why?"

"Our Colonel Rondon investigated the story. Almost the last thing known about him is that he or somebody in his party stole a canoe and some vegetables from some of the Indians. Think it out for yourself. Why should the Indians stand for that? I think he's dead—but still they send rescue expeditions in after him all the time. People go in there who know nothing about the business. Rescue Fawcett! It's fantastic. It's your newspapers that do it."

We slid down the Sweet Sea, past town after town, plantation after plantation, with dense jungles between, until at last we reached the city of Pará.

My mind was made up. Somehow, somewhere, on some quest or other, I was going into the interior. The whirlpool on the Napo could wait—I didn't have enough capital for that job and I was sick of searching for capital in South America. Perhaps in New York—perhaps I could someday form a syndicate. Meanwhile I had a little money left, and the yearning for adventure was as strong as ever.

Somehow, somewhere. It was a matter of keeping one's ears open for the proper opportunity.

I went from Pará to Rio de Janeiro, the most beautiful city in the world, to sit in sidewalk cafés and make friends, and to decide at leisure what my next move would be. There was gold in the interior; there were untold riches; even my cynical shipmate hadn't denied that. Someday it must be *for* me.

## Chapter XVI

ONE goes to a big city like Rio de Janeiro, determined to make the visit a short one and to get out again as soon as possible, in search of riches and new adventures. But it seldom works that way. One is unattached, torn by doubts, and floating in a space of indecision.

One day I was firmly resolved to go back up the Napo and get the gold out of that whirlpool; but then I took stock of my money and found there wasn't enough. I decided to stay in Rio awhile, keeping my eyes and ears open for something to turn up; but then I found that my money was disappearing at an alarming rate, and perhaps there wouldn't be enough for *anything* by the time I had reached a decision. I decided to find a job, but all I could locate were small, poorly paid, and unattractive; if I took one I would put myself up on a shelf and take myself out of circulation where I might hear of some better opportunity. I spent more days sightseeing and nursing my quandary at the tables of various sidewalk cafés, and came up short against the realization that there was only so much money, and it was disappearing fast. I decided to return to the United States to search for capital for the Napo whirlpool job, was on the verge of booking my passage, was suddenly aware that if I left Rio I might miss a lot of opportunities for wealth and adventure, spent another week or so in idle but expensive gadding, counted my dwindling funds, and was struck with the realization that I *had* to do something before the money was gone and I found myself on the beach.

Rio de Janeiro, the most beautiful city in the world and one of the most cosmopolitan and civilized, is especially fascinating to the man who has just come from the hinterlands. Like all capitals of countries that still have a frontier, it is thoroughly conscious of that frontier, proud of it, and a little ashamed of it at the same time. To the boulevardiers, the back jungles are the most mysterious, the most glamorous, the most perilous regions on earth; that is their way of bragging about Brazilian heroism. The most fantastic stories about the beauties and perils of Amazonas drift through in a constant stream, some true, some embroidered, and some pure invention—all of them passed from mouth to mouth in salons and cafés. Rio is proud of its backwoods because the people back there are heroic Brazilian frontiersmen. But Rio, the cultured, the most worldly city in America, is also ashamed of its backwoods because the frontiersmen there have never been in Paris to learn how civilized people live.

Exactly so must Washington and New York have felt at one time, when those two cities were young and busily aping European culture, while thoroughly aware of the turbulent frontier that was receding from their very back doors. Needless to say, I drank in every story, every stray rumor about the Amazonian jungles. Somehow, somewhere, there must be a clue for me. Somehow, somewhere, I would find the spur to further adventure. One day it came.

I sat at a café table, glumly going over my finances for the thousandth time, forming my thousandth high resolve to do something definite soon, when I became aware of two men sitting at the next table. They were obviously talking about the Amazonian jungles, but I could catch only snatches of their conversation. Then they got up to go, one of them pulling some change out of his pocket as he rose. He counted it ruefully, and then said: "Oh, well. Someday we'll go up the



damn about the treasure. You'd killed the dragon and that was all that counted. That was all you cared about when you were a kid, too, and heard those fairy stories. You forgot about all that gold in the cave."

"What in hell are you handing me?" I asked, baffled.

"It's always that way and you ought to know it. No dragon, no gold that anybody gives a damn about. Sir Walter Raleigh went up the Orinoco to look for El Dorado. He didn't get there, why? There were dragons in the way, only this time they were a lot of men without any heads—each of them had one eye in the middle of his chest and they were plenty tough."

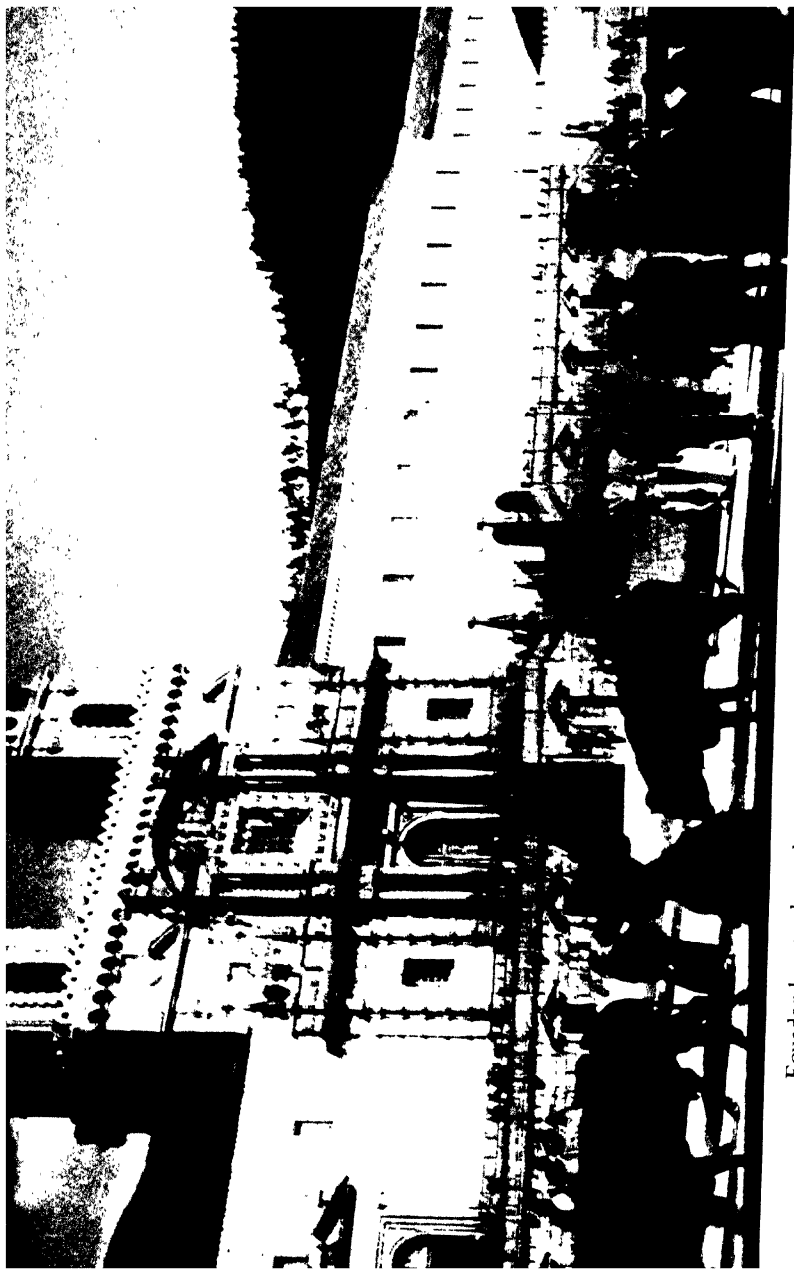
"Oh, come on down to earth. What are you talking about?"

"Well, it's the same way here. People talk about a lot of easy money and they also talk about the dragon that's guarding it. This time it's Chavantes. Indians. They have heads, they're made like you and me, but they're plenty tough too. Maybe they're there and maybe they aren't. Maybe the gold and the diamonds are there and maybe they aren't. There's always *something* to every persistent folk tale, so I'm quite ready to believe all these Rio das Mortes stories—with a few reservations."

Thoroughly interested, I asked for more information.

"That's all there is, except for the trimmings that you can hear in any restaurant if you keep your ears open. The River of the Dead is in one of the thickest parts of the Matto Grosso, and it's populated by some very bad boys. The Chavantes would slit your throat or fill you full of poisoned darts just as quick as look at you. You've been telling me about your Jivaro head-hunters in Ecuador. That's all sissy stuff compared to the things they say about these Chavantes. There





Ecuador boasts eleven large monastic institutions erected by the Spanish.

isn't a Jivaro born who wouldn't run like a rabbit from any little ten-year-old Chavante—the way they talk about them here."

"Don't you believe those stories?"

"Sure I believe them." He pointed to the map again. "Look: dotted line; unexplored. It's four hundred years since the white men first discovered this country, and that river's still unexplored. *Something's* been keeping people out of there. It isn't natural for people to go past the mouth of a good-sized river year after year for centuries, and not go up to see what's there. *Something's* been keeping them out, and it might as well be the Chavantes."

In the days and weeks that followed, the Rio das Mortes began to dominate my consciousness. It wouldn't let me rest. Thoughts of it hounded me increasingly. I knew that I had to do something; I knew that I would eventually explore that fabled river; I knew it was a harebrained idea; but I also knew that I was nearing the end of my financial rope.

I was mulling the thing over, counted my funds for the thousandth time, and finally got out pencil and paper for a definite check. Let's see—I still had most of my personal equipment from the last journey. I would need a bit more at so much. Transportation to the interior would be so much. I would need a man or two and he would cost money. I counted it all up—wages, food, equipment, transportation, trade goods for the Chavantes— And suddenly I saw that I still had enough to put through such an adventure. Barely enough. If I waited another week the way things were going in Rio—if I waited another week—but why in heaven's name wait? What was I stalling for? What was there in Rio de Janeiro?

Enough, enough. I chucked the paper aside and went out

to purchase the rest of my outfit. Men? I would get them near the frontier. Through Mendez I had had quite enough of these city chaps who thought they were explorers. As soon as I had arrived at a decision, I was all purpose and action again.

The River of the Dead would be invaded. There were dragons to be slain.

## Chapter XVII

RIBERAO PRETO is a city of from 25,000 to 30,000, in the interior of the state, and on the way to Matto Grosso. It is the commercial center of a vast area of coffee-plantations, a scrupulously clean city—and a modern one. There are fine buildings, fine homes, large, refreshing green lawns that are carefully tended and manicured, shiny, well-tended automobiles and buses, a splendid club, a fine bar —

I spent a week there, getting my teeth fixed in the clinic of an American dentist. He was interested in my quest and gave me advice.

"Get your men in the interior," he said. "Then you'll get them with experience in the country. Go to Balisa, to the diamond mines on the Araguaya River. There's the place to pick up your men. There's hundreds of them there that know the back country."

The advice was sound, but it was difficult to escape the jobseekers in Riberao Preto. They heard I was there, engaged on some mysterious quest—all quests were mysterious, and all had to do with diamonds—and they flocked to the hotel by the dozens to beg me to take them along. Most of them looked and acted too tough for me to take chances on them. "Suppose," I thought, "I *do* find gold and diamonds on the Rio das Mortes. These fellows'd slit my throat."

Nevertheless, I did pick up two men. Antonio Quiroz, Portuguese, blond, dark eyed, had a frank and cheerful

personality that appealed to me. He was an unemployed chauffeur who knew sections of the Matto Grosso, could handle a canoe, and seemed the right stuff. The other was Pablo Muñoz, a porter in my hotel. I liked him immediately. He was only thirty, but had spent a good many years in most parts of South America, in Europe, and the United States.

The three of us took a train for Arraguary, where we chartered a Ford truck for Balisa.

As I went, I became slightly irritated by a typical Brazilian habit, just one of those national habits that mean little in themselves but that grate on a man nevertheless. If I gave an order, or made a request, the answer was almost invariably:

"Si Dios quizer"—if God is willing.

"God?" I wanted to shout when I heard it the thousandth time. "What does God have to do with it? I'm asking you—" I was to be glad that I hadn't actually said it. I heard a story that showed that I was not the only one to be irritated by the habit.

We rumbled out of Arraguary, past an abandoned farm. The house seemed new and well built. A tractor stood in the shed, and modern improvements were to be seen everywhere.

"What's that place?"

"A German company had it," Quiroz informed me. "They had five square leagues. They planted cotton and had two crop failures. Then they closed down."

"What happened?"

"The administrator was a German. He was a pagan. He didn't believe in God. He kept saying that God had nothing to do with growing cotton; it was science that did it. He gave an order, and the man to whom he'd given it said, with true reverence, 'Si Dios quizer.' That is the way it ought to be, senhor. Who are we without God's help? But the German

administrator wouldn't allow that. He grew angry and red in the face, and he blasphemed God. He began to shout, 'You leave God out of this. You do as I tell you. You get to work now. I don't want to hear about God again.'

"It was terrible, I tell you, and the administrator was punished for his sin. Everybody around here knows what happened to him, and why it does not pay to deny God. The very first year, the Germans got a caterpillar in their plants that ate up all the leaves and destroyed everything. The other plantations around here didn't have that worm, but this one did. The next year the administrator planted his cotton later, and he still kept saying that God didn't have anything to do with it at all. So that year the pods didn't even open. Other people around here had good crops both years. But this German company went bankrupt and the administrator went home again. That's what happens—" Antonio shrugged his shoulders.

The trip began to be strenuous. It started to rain and the dirt road was turned into a river of mud. We skidded into ditches, cut branches to put in the road ahead of us, and scoured the countryside, soaked to the skin, for farmers with oxen that might pull us out of holes. Bridges over streams consisted of two logs each, roughly flattened on top. We chugged over them in the pelting rain, chewing our hearts.

After two days we reached a small village, Rio Verde, Green River. It was obvious that the car couldn't go on, and wouldn't be able to get back if it did go on. I sent the driver back. Antonio and Pablo went out to look up a pack train, while I holed in at the local "hotel."

"Holed in" was right. There were no beds in our room. Its only furnishings were three sets of hooks from which



guests could suspend their own hammocks. The rest of the facilities were on a corresponding scale.

Antonio and Pablo returned. They had found a farmer who could rent us nine pack and saddle mules. But some would have to be shod, and they would not be ready till the following afternoon. There was nothing to do but wait. We did it on the hotel veranda, looking gloomily out at the rain and the muddy streets, being stared at in turn by the village inhabitants.

They came, one after the other, from all the houses, to stand and gape and to ask questions. Or rather a question; it was always the same one:

"O senhor va a comprar brilliantes?"

"No," I answered repeatedly, "I am not buying diamonds."

"The senhor is selling perhaps?"

It was always the same, all afternoon. The town lived and breathed diamonds, and no passing stranger could possibly have any other quest. Annoyed by the questions, I decided to tell the truth. I told it to batch after batch of visitors, and always the reaction was the same incredulous wonder.

"We are headed for the Rio das Mortes."

"Rio das Mortes! E perigroso! It is dangerous!"

I heard them discussing the news among themselves. Rio das Mortes. They will die. It is bad up there. Even Lampeao wouldn't go up there.

I heard it several times, that name, Lampeao. Some famous local prospector no doubt. I'd ask Antonio about him sometime.

The next afternoon our mules arrived and we set out across the sparsely settled country to the north. Houses were scarce, but there was always one for the night—the home of a telegraph operator—the home of a widow —

We arrived at the widow's ranch and sat in our saddles outside, in accordance with Brazilian custom, shouting for the owner. She came eventually, a buxom, middle-aged woman who bade us welcome with rather poor grace after she had looked us over. We entered the house and had the inevitable small coffee. But what coffee! Brazilian coffee is something to grow homesick for. It has no resemblance to what we call coffee up here. It is something entirely different and immeasurably superior. The bean is roasted black immediately before being brewed, and the aroma permeates everything and adds flavor to the drink. It is pounded with a wooden mortar in a wooden pestle made of a section of log. And then one has nectar!! It is futile even to try to describe it.

We drank the widow's coffee and I entered a dingy room to put my things away and look around. I thought I was alone, but suddenly, with a start, I was aware of a figure seated on a cot, staring silently at me. He was a young man. He had been working on a packsaddle and put his work aside to look at me. And then, as my eyes became accustomed to the gloom, I realized that *there was a heavy chain padlocked around his neck.*

I looked again, horror-stricken. There was no mistake about it. He was chained in that corner!

"Boas dias," he finally said in a perfectly normal tone.

I returned the salutation and we got into a trivial conversation about the weather. The youth looked and sounded rational and healthy, but I couldn't take my eyes off his chain. But he talked on as if unaware of it.

"Where are you going?" he asked. If he noticed my curiosity, he disregarded it. The chain rattled as he worked, but he paid no attention.

"We're going to Balisa."

"I worked in the diamond mines over there about four years ago," he said, snipping off a piece of leather and working industriously at his saddle.

My companions hadn't come in and I went out to look for the widow. I found her in the kitchen, a shack set apart from the house. She didn't encourage conversation, but I went right to the point.

"Why is that fellow chained to the post?"

For the first time she lifted her eyes from the stove and glared darkly at me. Without inflection or change of expression she said, "He is my son. He's crazy."

For a moment I fumbled for words—bewildered. "He seems normal," I finally said somewhat lamely. "I just talked to him. He doesn't seem to be crazy."

She turned her back on me and went on with her work at the stove. As if talking to her pots and pans, she said, in the same monotone she had used before:

"He was running a cow. About three years ago. He fell off his horse and hit his head on a stone. He hasn't been right since."

Again I said that he seemed perfectly normal to me.

"Yes. He did to us, too, about a year ago. We thought he was well then and we took his chain off. But that very day he stabbed his only brother to death."

I couldn't help myself. I talked too much. "If it had been me," I said, "I would have killed the whole lot of you."

She turned slowly to face me, and I saw rage in her eye. But I gave her no chance to overwhelm me with the torrent of invective that I expected.

"There are institutions for the insane," I said. "Why don't you send him to one of those, where he can be treated?"

The angry fire died out of her eyes. "Then who would

make the packsaddles?" she asked in a plaintive, tired voice. "Life is hard here. I make my living by selling packsaddles. If I send him away, who will make them?"

That evening I talked again to the boy, his mother sitting in the room and listening to every word. Again he seemed oblivious to the chain. He asked me many intelligent and interested questions about the world. I saw that the chain had chafed raw spots on his neck. Without comment or asking permission, I wrapped absorbent cotton around it. His mother glared at me as I did it, but he gave me a look of unconcealed gratitude.

As we were leaving the next morning, I slipped him some cigarettes and magazines. His mother stood in the door, watching. As I turned to go, he suddenly grabbed my arm and pulled my ear down to his mouth.

"Tell the police," he whispered, hoarsely and desperately. I don't know if the mother heard him. She saw him whispering and she strode into the room immediately, anger in her eyes.

I wrote a letter about the affair to the Goyaz chief of police, but I never heard from him.

Antonio, Pablo, and I rode along on our mules, discussing the poor fellow. My two companions were as indignant as I.

"Lampeao should see that," said Antonio. "He would set him free. He would burn the house down with the old lady in it, and set the poor son free, and perhaps take him along."

"Antonio, who is this fellow Lampeao? I've been hearing about him."

He stared at me in astonishment. "Lampeao? You don't know about Lampeao? He is the most famous man around here. He is a bandit and the whole Brazilian army can't catch him."

"A bandit?"

"Yes. He rides with a small army. He has thirty men with him, all of them desperate. He swoops around, robbing and looting, and nobody can catch him. The poor people won't let him be caught. He divides his loot with the poor. He is good to them. He burns and plunders towns, he holds rich ranchers for ransom, and he kills soldiers. He loves to kill soldiers. And nobody can catch him."

"So that's it. He knows the back country, does he? A good traveler?"

"A good traveler? Senhor, I'm surprised that you haven't heard of him. He is a better traveler than any wild Indian. He knows every corner, every hill, every jungle in this country. The government sent sixty soldiers after him once. He waited for them and killed them all. The politicians in Rio de Janeiro tore their hair. They sent eight hundred soldiers after him. But he knew the cattinga and they had to stay on the roads. He lured them into all the wild corners he could find. It was terrible, I tell you. He killed some of them, and some died of fever and starvation. They were lost. They couldn't find their way about. Their shoes and their clothes wore out and they were marching on bleeding feet as he led them on, always ahead and laughing at them, and picking them off with his rifles, one by one.

"There was a howl in Rio, I tell you, and all the time the poor people around here were hiding Lampeao. In Rio the newspapers were full of indignation. Lampeao, the bandit, had made asses out of our army. It was a national disgrace. What was our army for? What did we have airplanes for? Those bandits should be bombed out of their shelters with modern planes.

"All this time he was burning towns and ranches, and

stealing from the rich to give to the poor, and laughing at the Brazilian army. So finally the President said that he was ready to send an airplane to rout him out. Brazil's most famous flier was coming in here himself to machine-gun and bomb Lampeao. The President said so in the newspapers and there was great excitement."

Antonio stopped to look at me. "Senhor," he asked, "you say you didn't see any of that in the papers?"

"No. I didn't see it. Go on, what happened? Did they get him?"

He laughed. "Did they get him? They got a letter from Lampeao instead. A very polite letter, addressed to the President but sent to all the papers too. He said he would be delighted to receive the famous flier. 'Here in the cattinga,' he said to the President. And then he added, 'and in two weeks I shall be equally delighted to send you his ears for a souvenir.' That letter was in all the papers too, and some people were indignant, and some of them laughed, and a lot of those who were indignant in public and in their government offices did their laughing at home."

"What happened? Did the flier come?"

"No," said Antonio smiling. "No, he didn't come. Lampeao is still loose."

We arrived in Balisa after a few days, a shack town of diamond miners and buyers, tied to the city of Pará by the Diesel freight launch that came up the river every two and a half months. We were on time. The launch hadn't arrived yet. We depended on it to take us down to the mouth of the Rio das Mortes, some three hundred miles away.

On our very first day in Balisa I acquired a new man.

I went to the river for a bath, and there, stark naked, was the finest physical specimen of a man I had ever seen. I stared

at him with interest. He was about six feet tall, with broad shoulders and narrow hips. He was washing clothes. Strong muscles rippled under his glowing skin as he pounded and wrung them. His hair was black, and his features were sharply cut and intelligent.

"You arrived yesterday?" he asked unconcernedly.

"That's right."

"Mining diamonds, or buying them perhaps?"

"No. I'm going on an expedition down the river."

He flashed his strong white teeth in an eager smile. "Can you use another man? I've been here two months and I can't get a job, and I haven't enough for a grubstake to go mining. Take me with you."

I had intended to pick up another man. This fellow looked like an ideal choice.

"It's no ordinary expedition," I said, watching him closely. "Most people say we'll never get back alive. We're heading for the Rio das Mortes."

"Ha! The Rio das Mortes!" He seemed fairly to burst with enthusiasm. "That's the kind of thing I'd like. The River of the Dead, eh? Chavantes, savage Indians, the black jaguar, tigrés, anacondas—I've heard of all that. They scare their little children with those stories around here. I should very much like to go along."

He climbed out of the water to sit on a rock next to me.

"Listen, senhor. I'm not afraid of man or devil. I know these jungles inside and out. I've been all through this country, on land and water—for six years. I know the cattinga—the brush country. I can handle a canoe; I can hunt; I can shoot. I can go without eating for days at a stretch and I don't care if I never have a roof over my head. Take me along."

"How old are you?"

"Twenty-one."

"H-m. You started young. For six years you've been roaming through here."

"Si, senhor. I started young. The boy's blood is hot, and it's the boy who learns more than the man. I can take care of you in there. I can see that you never starve and are safe. Take me along. Chavantes—ha!"

The fellow intrigued me immensely.

"All right. Come to the hotel tonight. I'll talk it over with the other two. If it's all right with them, you can go along. If I hire you, you can eat with us at the hotel until we leave."

He grinned delightedly. "When do we leave?"

"When the launch comes and goes again."

"I hope it will be soon." He said it with all the zest of a small boy.

He came to the hotel that night. His name was Marcel Silva, and both Pablo and Antonio were eager to have him along. In the months to come he was to prove his worth again and again, and to help us through many difficult times.



## Chapter XVIII

NOBODY in Balisa cared about the River of the Dead, except as an interesting legend and a topic of conversation. Word got around that we were going there, and people thought, if anything, that we were slightly touched—perhaps with some justice. The town was concerned with only one thing—diamonds. We were the only guests at the hotel who were not diamond buyers. Miners came in at all hours, took bags out of their pockets, and emptied the rough diamonds on a table in front of the buyers, who examined each one carefully through a glass.

A man came up to me as I stood watching the scene, and held out a rose-colored stone. It was a beautiful gem, weighing twenty carats. He offered to sell it to me for ten contos—around nine hundred dollars. But I knew nothing about diamonds and refused. A man who saw me turn the stone down bought it for nine contos. I met him by accident in Rio many months later. He told me then, with some glee, that he had sold it for thirty thousand dollars after having it cut and polished.

I bought a few more things in Balisa, and wished I had had the sense to buy them in Rio, where prices were about half. There were some more firearms to be acquired, and a number of odds and ends. Antonio went along and had himself a wonderful time. He wanted me to buy everything I saw, and it was difficult to argue with him. I put a stop to the whole business after I found myself coming out of a shop

with fifty especially large and fancy Roman candles. I had no idea why I had bought them, but the winsome Antonio had talked me into it.

"You never can tell what might happen," he had insisted. "You never can tell ——"

Well, he proved to be right. You never could tell what might happen. Plenty *did* happen and we were to be very glad that we had those fireworks along.

There was no doctor in the village, and I, as the visiting North American, seemed to be elected to the job. People wanted me to prescribe for everything from toothache to venereal disease. There was no escaping them, so I gave them Epsom salts, aspirin, and grave advice.

We picked up two more men in Balisa, but they didn't really count. As we proceeded down the river, and the stories about the River of the Dead became more and more realistic the nearer we came to that fabled stream, they grew more and more worried, until they finally left me after having had several hundred miles of free transportation down the Araguaya.

The launch arrived and we booked our passage. She was discharging freight—principally gasoline to be sold at fifty cents a gallon—and taking on passengers for the downstream voyage. There were no cabins. Passengers brought their own hammocks and hung them anywhere they could—side by side, end to end and at angles, one over the other—in a crazy pattern that filled every available inch of space. Passengers, men and women, jostled each other at every turn. Often they could not get out of their hammocks because there was no room for them anywhere else. And yet, during the days that we chugged slowly down the river they all remained hilariously good-humored. One of the miracles of travel in

South America's hinterlands is the spirit of jovial acceptance and companionship with which passengers on hundreds of crazy river craft accept the most annoying discomforts.

I had asked Marcel to go over our supplies to see whether, in his opinion, anything was missing. He had a slight grin on his face as he examined every item, but he said nothing. I felt vaguely uncomfortable—as if Marcel was too courteous to inform me that I had much too much stuff. I remembered my own amazement over the mountain of equipment that Mendez had purchased in Quito. We hadn't nearly so much. But to a bushwacker like Marcel ———

We put in at Leopoldinho, and he suggested that I buy two large sacks of rock salt.

"Rock salt? What's that for? And why two sacks of it?"

He grinned. "We might meet some Indians. It will come in handy then. They'll do almost anything for salt."

Marcel hadn't talked much about himself, but I suspected that he knew a great deal more about the Indians than he had told. He was right about the salt. The Amazon Basin is one of the few large areas in the world that is "saltless" in the sense that salt is unknown in the diet and the economy of the aborigines. They have got along without it for thousands of years—as many thousands of Indians still do. With the advent of the white man, however, they not only learn to like it, but also learn its extreme value—especially in a tropical country—for preserving such foodstuffs as fish and meat. But in their own native jungle haunts they have no salt deposits. In many regions, therefore, where traffic between Indians and whites is still sporadic, salt is the principal medium of exchange, the money with which whites buy services and goods from the Indians. One plate of crude rock



his bridge, like many others of its kind in Ecuador, hangs between two walls of solid granite.



The mountain Indian is a silent and stoic fellow stolidly enduring many hardships. On feast days with the help of *chicha*, the native drink, he compensates strenuously for the monotony of his existence.





salt is often worth as much as five or ten dollars. I was to learn its value on the River of the Dead.

We disembarked at a small, run-down, malarial jungle settlement of some ten families on the bank of the Araguaya, a few miles from the Rio das Mortes. It consisted of some ten families who had come from Maranhão a few years before—heaven only knows why—and who were aching to get home again, in part because of ill-health, in part because of their fear of Indians.

The desolate little settlement, barely holding its own against the encroaching jungle, was the region's last outpost of the white man. Twenty miles away was Santa Isabel, a large village of Caraja Indians. Like many semicivilized Indians living on the fringe of the white man's world, they were inclined to be uncertain. Such Indians belong neither to the world of the aborigines nor to that of the whites—and by the same token they belong to both. They can never be "tamed" entirely, because, any time they don't like it where they are, they can withdraw into the wild jungle regions where nobody can get at them.

The white people in the little settlement—I forget its name and am not sure that it even had one—lived in constant fear and mistrust of the Carajas of Santa Isabel. Lately the Indians had become unfriendly to civilized people; I was told that they had fired at some men from the settlement a few days before our arrival.

We were on the last frontier, and everything reminded us of it. For sleeping quarters we were assigned a large shed, near the edge of the jungle. My hammock was hung near the front in the open doorway—the others slept farther in. We had just crawled in, under our mosquito nets, when I heard a chuckle from Marcel.

"Senhor, this is very nice for us."

"What's nice for you?"

"Your sleeping in the door like that. They tell me that a jaguar came out of the jungle just a few nights ago, and killed a dog in this very shed. If he comes back, he'll have to tackle you first. We'll have plenty of time."

He chuckled again, rolled over, and soon began to snore. But his casual little joke began to grow on me as I lay and listened to the night noises from the forest, tossing in that nervous restlessness that always besets a man just before he plunges into a new undertaking.

Would that jaguar come out again? How would we fare on the River of the Dead? The Carajas down below were inclined to be hostile, were they? The Chavantes on the Rio das Mortes were the most savage Indians in South America. What was that noise? Over there, in the jungle?

I strained my ears, felt my revolver, made sure my flashlight was working.

It's gone now. The noise is gone. I wish to God it would keep on. That's funny—ha—a noise that isn't there is worse than a noise that *is* there. A jaguar noise that you can't hear is the loudest of them all. The Chavantes are the worst Indians of them all, but the River of the Dead is paved with gold and diamonds. Paved with gold and diamonds? That's a good one too. What the hell am I doing on this expedition anyway? Do we have enough arms? Five rifles, a shotgun, and my revolver. There's four of us. What in hell will we do with all that arsenal? Shoot Roman candles at the naked bellies of savages that come whooping out on the warpath? Pop. Right on the navel with a green ball. Listen to him yell. Hey, try a blue ball this time. They burn better. Ha—listen

to him—there, there it is again. . . . What's that noise? Over in the jungle. Some animal making a noise.

I lay tense for a while. The animal came nearer. Now the noise really was there—something crawling up. It wasn't five feet away. Damn Marcel and his stories of jaguars.

I shot my flashlight out. There was a snort and a scuffle. A peaceful jackass stared into the light for a moment, wheeled, and trotted away. Marcel mumbled sleepily:

"What's the matter, senhor?"

"Keep quiet. It's just a jaguar, looking us over."

He chuckled again and went to sleep.

The Chavantes. What are these Chavantes like? Would they ——?

The next morning I looked over the village. It was on the south side of a large effluvial island. The north side looked much better for a settlement and I asked one of the inhabitants, "What's the matter with that side? It's much cleaner and healthier and more open. You'd have less malaria there."

"It's the Chavantes," he said. "They have never come across to the island, but they come to the riverbank up there on the other side. If they saw us they might come across. They're bad Indians."

"What about these Chavantes? Tell me about them."

"Ay, senhor, they're fierce. They don't allow white men in their country. They kill and they plunder, and nothing can be done with them. For many years the priests and the Indian Protective Service have been trying to tame them, but they can't do a thing with them. They've given up."

"The Indian Protective Service? What's that?"

"It's a government service to civilize the savages. It does wonderful work, but it can't do anything with the Chavantes.



It's the most dangerous service there is, but it does wonderful work."

"How does it tame the Indians? With soldiers? With arms?"

He looked astonished. "With soldiers? In that country? How long do you think a soldier would last in there? Arrows and poisoned darts flying out of the bush, and you can't see where they come from."

I nodded, remembering my experiences on the Napo.

"No, they do it with magic and presents and curiosity."

I asked for details, but my informant hesitated.

"Mind you, it's a government service, and sometimes it is good and sometimes not. When the politicians in Rio get mixed up in it, it smells to high heaven. Things are always that way. But the men who come out to these wilderness-regions to do the work, they are the real heroes. They are the heroes who risk their lives against the jungles and the wild Indians, and as often as not the politicians in Rio abandon them, desert them, graft on their pay—the fat politicians who sit in their comfortable armchairs in Rio de Janeiro and make speeches about patriotism."

I assured him that things like that went on in other countries as well. I wanted details of how the service worked for the pacification of the Indians.

"It's the most lonely service in the world," he went on. "The men of the Indian Protective Service go out in pairs—two of them at a time—into the wildest country where there are wild savages. They spot some Indian trail, and there they stay and behave themselves, and pay no attention to the savages. They just stay there and make magic and go about their own business, and arouse the curiosity of the Indians."

"Make magic? How do you mean?"

"Senhor, often they pick out the tallest tree, and they build a ladder to the top, and build a platform up there that is protected against arrows, and sit there day after day, where everybody can see them. Wouldn't your curiosity be aroused if you saw two men up in a tall tree, just sitting there doing nothing? You'd sneak up closer to look at them, wouldn't you?"

I admitted that I would, regardless of whether or not I was a savage.

"And then, if they suddenly started to make a loud and strange kind of music, you'd run like the devil, wouldn't you? But not for long. After a while you'd discover that the noise doesn't hurt. You might think that the men up there are crazy, but their noise isn't so bad—it's rather pleasant, in fact. So then you'd come sneaking up more often, even if you did still always keep out of sight."

"Music? What kind of music?"

"Gramophones. The best and the loudest gramophones there are. They take them up there in the treetops and they play beautiful music that can be heard a long way. And don't ever make a mistake about these Indians. They like music. They like the white man's music. They'll come miles to hear it."

Incredulous, I asked where all that was going on.

"All over the wilder parts of Brazil. The Indian Protective Service tries to make friends with all the wild Indians. They used to work near here too, but now they've given up the Chavantes."

"All right. After they make the music, what do they do? They're still up in the tree."

"Oh, they come down. They are expert woodsmen and they try to come down when there are no Indians around.

And then, after a while, they'll put a present along the trail where the savages will find it. A few beads, a piece of cloth, a knife—any kind of present. If it is gone the next day, it's a good sign. Then they leave another present. And then they start dropping the presents down from the tree, after they see from the signs—a bush rustling or something like that—that the Indians are down there. That way they get the savages to show themselves. And then, pretty soon they make friendly contact with them, and it isn't long before they give shirts and trousers, and salt and knives, to all the Indians around there. And then everything is all right. The Indians are civilized."

I had long come to suspect that in the Brazilian interior civilization is synonymous with pants. An Indian with trousers on is civilized—without them he's a savage. That is the way you can tell.

"What do they do then? What do they do with the Indians after they're civilized?"

"They try to break up the tribe, if they can. But it doesn't always work. Those Carajas down there, they wouldn't be broken up. They stayed together, and that's bad. But the Protective agents put clothes on the Indians, and then offer them jobs where they can earn as many presents as they want. And then they ship them away if the Indians will go. One by one, scattered all over the country. To the Amazon River, to the plantations, to the cities, to the diamond mines, any place where there is work for them."

So—it was no wonder that I had heard throughout South America that our own Indian policy was barbaric. South Americans as a rule thought that we do little in the United States except send out military expeditions to slaughter the red men.

"But the Chavantes. You say it didn't work with them?"

"No. The Chavantes wouldn't take the presents. They destroyed them and left the pieces there. And next to the broken presents they stuck war arrows into the trail. That means to keep out. They are bad Indians who want no white men in their country."

Speculating on the information, I went ahead with my preparations. Did we have enough presents? What was the good if the Indians didn't want them?

For our ascent of the river, we found a *batalão*, a heavy, wide-beamed, clinker-built boat, thirty-two feet long, with thwarts in the forward end for rowers. The oars were long poles, with round wooden blades tied to them with heavy cord. The four of us turned to, to calk and pitch the unwieldy craft. The settlement raised tobacco, and I bought some twenty meters of it—twisted into long ropes an inch in diameter. It might come in handy with the Chavantes. Eventually, too, I learned to shave it fine, roll it into cigarettes covered with a thin tree bark, and smoke the black stuff without fainting.

Three dugouts, filled with naked Caraja Indians, pulled into the landing, and the men and women, on their way up the Araguaya, walked unconcernedly about the village. On request of the settlement's men, we told them that we were going to stay there, and showed them our arms in order to discourage them from any attack they might be planning.

Eagerly one of the older Indians reached for a rifle. He became surly and ill-tempered when I snatched it away from him. Apparently he was used to getting what he wanted, and wouldn't take no for an answer. After a while, however, he settled for a little tin whistle, which he accepted with a great show of glee.

I gave the villagers a rifle in return for their hospitality. We had five and we were only four on our expedition. The settlers might be able to use that rifle against the Carajas someday.

Finally, at five one morning, we got under way, with the Godspeed and sincere good wishes of the humble inhabitants of that pitiful little frontier settlement.

All day we labored up the wild river, and at night we picked a campsite, cooked supper, and turned in under our mosquito nets.

There was the old familiar rustle of the forest, the perennial sound of insects which becomes like a solid, material thing, the scream of night birds, the grunting of something that might be a jaguar, the distant howl of monkeys, and the constant murmur of the river. In the humid air were strange and pungent jungle scents, and overhead was the black sky, punctured with brilliant stars.

I lay in my hammock, thinking, and talking at random to the others, each under his ghostly mosquito net.

"So this is the River of the Dead! So far it seems peaceful enough. What is supposed to happen to the people who come here to look for its treasures?"

From another hammock came Marcel's voice, drawling lazily.

"Lampeao never allowed his men to look for buried treasure. He said it brought bad luck."

Lampeao. There he was again. Antonio's voice floated out from under another net. "Lampeao! Is that the way he is? I've read a lot about him."

"I didn't read that," said Marcel quietly.

For a moment the full significance of that statement escaped us. Then there was a sudden stir, as though Antonio

was sitting up in his hammock. "What? You've talked to him?" His voice was loud with excitement.

"Certainly I've talked to him. For five years. I was one of his men—his bandits. That is why I went on this expedition. If anybody in Balisa had recognized me ——"

There was a sudden shock of silence against the murmur from the jungle, as that bit of information soaked into us. Then Antonio's voice again: "You were with him? Tell us about it. Lampeao's man, you were Lampeao's man."

Marcel chuckled. The inside of his net was suddenly illuminated by the flare of a match as he lit a cigarette. Then I could see the occasional brightness of the cigarette end. I couldn't see Marcel. But out of the jungle night, somewhere beyond my own net, came his story, in fits as I dozed off. One of Lampeao's bandits. Would I have hired him had I known it?

Marcel's voice was calm and unruffled. "I wanted you people to know," he said. "It is better that way. They called me Anjo in the band, and the police called me Anjo too. I left Lampeao months ago and went to Bahia. But the police were on my trail and I came to Balisa. Five months. It took me five months to walk that distance. For the first two months I walked only at night. I was one of Lampeao's best men but I left him because there is no future for a bandit except prison or death."

From the jungle came the scream of a night bird.

"How did you ever join him?"

"Murder. I was fifteen when I killed my first man. He needed killing, but the police didn't see it that way.

"Pernambuco— We lived in Pernambuco. My father had a ranch there—a good ranch on fertile soil. But there was a wealthy man who was our neighbor, and he cheated us out

of the best part of our property. What we had left was worthless. He cheated us out of it and there was nothing my father could do.

"I was only five when that happened. We were forced to move, and from then on nothing went right. We moved from place to place, in poverty and need. I spent my childhood hearing my father curse that wealthy man who had once been our neighbor."

There was a glow in Marcel's net as he dragged on his cigarette. I was oblivious to the jungle now.

"I did it when I was fifteen. It seemed the thing to do. I'm older now, and I don't know. But when one is fifteen it seems right. I took a shotgun and I went to the man's house and I killed him. Then I went home and my sister hid me in the cattinga, and brought me food every day. But that was dangerous for her too, so I ran away.

"I ran away and I roamed alone for five months, stealing my food. And then I ran into Lampeao's band. I went right up to them and demanded to see the leader. Fifteen years old, and walking in like a cock of the roost, demanding the leader. Nobody but Lampeao would do for me and I asked to join the band. You can bet that he laughed. But when I told him I was wanted by the police for murder, he took me in.

"'Murder,' he said. 'That is good. That makes a dependable man.'

"I *was* a dependable man too. One of the best. Reckless as a fool. But I grew tired of it and got away. I got away at Bahia, where I was sent with four others to steal some horses."

Antonio wanted more, much more. Evidently he was an ardent Lampeao fan.

"That's all for tonight," said Marcel quietly. "I'm tired. I just wanted you to know."

I lay awake a long time, thinking about the story, and about Marcel's perfect poise and lack of dramatics. No bravado, no apologies.

That night I developed infinite faith in Marcel's integrity. In the difficult months to come I was to discover that I had not misplaced my faith.



## Chapter XIX

AFTER a few days the dense forest along the river gave way to an open pampa, a fertile sea of waving grass, with clumps of forest only here and there, and with the blue haze of mountains in the distance.

Week after happy week there was no sign of Indians. We had twenty-four delightful days, rowing when we felt like it, loafing when we wanted, hunting our food. Deer, turkeys, grouse, all the fish we wanted to pull out of the river—it was a hunter's paradise. We came to an abandoned cabin where the Salesian fathers had once lived while trying unsuccessfully to lure the Chavantes into Christianity and civilization. Weeks later we came to the ruins of an old adobe house, with several brass buttons in them. Brass buttons? Had they belonged to Portuguese soldiers in colonial days? Near by were piles of gravel and other evidences of gold mining. Somebody had once been up here. Had he found anything?

We panned for gold and diamonds every day, but day by day our efforts grew more desultory. The bottom of the river was not paved with treasure, but we hardly cared. There were a few scant returns—a little dust here and there—but gold had lost its meaning in that paradise of nature. Monkeys peered and chattered at us out of the occasional clumps of trees; there was a jaguar—asleep—his skin went along with us and served as cover for our load of supplies. Stalking deer through the tall grass was bothersome and

perhaps dangerous—insects—snakes—who knows what we might run into. I dressed myself in a red sweater and went toward them—openly and brazenly. It annoyed them and they ran to chase me away—and be killed by my rifle. No animals were gun-shy—or man-shy. One reached out and had meat—all one wanted.

We ate venison fresh, and we roasted it when it was to be kept till the next day. We rowed, and loafed, and hunted, ate and told jokes, panned gold and kept quiet over any possible disappointment in not finding any. We lost our fear of the Indians. It was unthinkable that there should be anything hostile within miles of us.

Marcel and I squatted by the river, swirling our pans. He pulled his out and inspected it—nothing—a speck or two perhaps. He laughed:

“We’re not getting rich.”

“Not very fast.” I looked behind me, over the waving pampa, at the dancing blue line of the distant hills. “I wonder what’s over there?”

“I’ve been wondering myself. All that lovely country. Empty; unexplored. We’re as likely to find gold there as here on the river.”

“Those hills back there ——”

“Look at those savannas. Grass up to your waist. Wealth; grass is riches, and often better than gold. If one could have cattle here.”

“Those hills over there. I’ve been thinking. If we could reach them. We might find gold and diamonds over there.”

“It would be nice to travel overland for a while. I’m tired of rowing. We could go in for a few days and see what’s there. What’s keeping us?”

“That’s right. What’s keeping us?”

Pablo wanted to do some washing. It kept us by the river for a day, while the rest of us made up our packs. Hammocks, mosquito nets, rifles, ammunition, a little roasted meat, machetes, an Everready flashlight with fresh cells—I'd been reading the ads—salt, matches, trinkets, pans for gold. We didn't need too much. We could be self-supporting in that game paradise.

Antonio came with a batch of Roman candles.

"What are they for?" asked Marcel.

"Just in case."

I laughed. "I had kind of a dream about those things. Just in case we're attacked. There come the Chavantes out of the tall grass, yelling war whoops. Light up the Roman candles. Pop! The chief's hit on the belly button. It's wonderful."

Marcel laughed. Antonio looked bewildered and a bit hurt. "Take them along," I said. "Take them along. We might get separated. They'll be useful as signals."

But the Roman candles, I am now convinced, were what saved our lives the following night. For it wasn't long before we blundered into an adventure more weird than any of us had dreamed possible, an adventure that was to hold us for months, literally, transplanted to another world, to another age—a primitive, remote age, in which man was little more than just another animal, a bit more curious perhaps, a bit more articulate, a trifle more savage, but otherwise just another predatory beast of the savannas and the jungles.

There was a faint trail, leading inland, and we plodded steadily over it all morning. We came to a large lake. We cut trees to make a raft for our supplies, and swam to the other side, pushing it. The trail was then resumed and began to widen. We dressed and walked on. Suddenly Marcel stopped, pointing to the ground.

"What's up, Marcel?"

He stared ahead. "Footprints. Indians. They're somewhere near us. They were here not long ago."

Footprints! It came as a shock and all four of us stood looking at them not knowing what to say. In spite of all the rumors we had heard about the Chavantes, our world had for over three weeks been a paradise of green that didn't belong to man. Seeing no signs of men, we had been lulled into a feeling of security. This empire had been ours, and ours alone. Yet here it was—footprints. Suddenly all four of us remembered with a rush the tales we had heard about the Chavantes.

"What do we do now?" "Do we go on?" "They're near here someplace." "I'm for being careful." "Careful? Of course, we have to be careful." "I have an idea that they won't hurt us. If you treat Indians well—" "Yea-a-ah. But maybe they haven't heard that one. Maybe they won't give us a chance to treat them well."

Marcel looked at Pablo. "Nice fat lad—eh? If I were a cannibal ——"

"I'm damned if I know what to do next. One footprint like that. It comes right up and smacks you in the face, no? We stay here awhile and eat lunch, and think it over. No use being hasty."

"Maybe they know something about all that gold on the Rio das Mortes."

"Lot of good that will do if they kill us," said Pablo apprehensively.

We ate, and decided to go on—carefully.

Nothing happened in the course of the afternoon. We made camp in a small forest that stood like an island in the sea of grass. We shot a fawn and roasted the meat for the

morrow. There were no more signs of human life. The next day we pushed on, toward the line of hills on the horizon.

It was hot and our packs were heavy. Marcel grumbled. "I'd like to catch the dog who's moving those hills away from us."

"I don't like this," said Pablo.

"Pack too heavy?"

"No. Those footprints back there."

Marcel was leading, and suddenly he stopped.

"Quiet. We're there."

"What's up, Marcel?"

There was a clearing immediately ahead. Bananas, corn, peanuts and mandioca were planted in it!

We took off our packs and sat down, suddenly overwhelmed with the realization that we might be walking into something. Bananas, corn, peanuts, mandioca—and all our fine world of wilderness and peace came tumbling about our ears. Behind the plantation was another spot of jungle, and suddenly it looked dark and ominous.

Pablo looked nervously about him. "I don't like it," he said again.

"Sh-h-h-h! Not so loud," from Marcel.

"We should turn back," whispered Antonio.

I made a decision. "Yes, pick up your packs."

But it was too late. A face peered at us out of the tall corn, and then another, and another, until it seemed that the stalks were growing copper-colored visages instead of ears of golden corn.

There was a moment of intense silence.

"What do we do now?" asked Pablo out of the corner of his mouth, never taking his eyes off the savages. Long black

hair with square-cut bangs surrounded their faces, which were painted in weird, black patterns.

"Do nothing. Sit quietly. Don't make a move." It was too late to reach for guns. They probably had us covered.

An Indian, large and elderly, stepped out of the cornfield and approached us. One by one the others came out, until there were about thirty, most of them with bows and arrows. The old fellow walked straight toward us, neither friendliness nor menace on his face. No word was spoken. I made an effort to smile, but it was not returned. My gun was behind me, leaning against a tree.

The naked Indian stopped a few feet from me and began to speak in a harsh voice. A murmur of voices came from his companions behind him. I looked at Marcel.

"Keep looking at him," he said without taking his own eyes off the fellow. "Don't move your heads. Don't nod them or shake them. Do nothing that they'll interpret as an answer."

One of the younger Indians whispered something to his companions, and suddenly they all began to giggle. It broke the tension for an instant, but the old chief in front hushed them with a stern command. Then they were stony-faced again. I could feel my heart pounding.

Then, abruptly, the chief turned on his heels and started up the path, motioning to us to follow. The others closed in on us. We picked up our packs and went along.

Single file through the jungle—and perhaps it was our last walk. The jungle had lost its beauty. Stalking ahead, the chief never once looked back. He was only about five feet tall, but his regal bearing gave him a majestic look. His shoulders were broad and powerful, and muscles rippled over his sturdy frame as he walked.

Marcel fingered his rifle.

"Be careful," I warned. It wasn't the time to shoot. Evidently these Indians didn't know what firearms were, or they would have taken them away from us.

The jungle opened onto a clearing, where the earth was packed hard and swept clean. Some forty large and well-built houses of poles and palm thatch opened onto a central plaza. A tremendous commotion went up as we entered. Babbling excitedly, men, women and children poured out of all the houses. Naked, some dark and some light, some ugly and some beautiful, some misshapen and some well proportioned, all of them talking at once, rapidly and in shrill voices, laughing and touching our faces and clothes, they crowded around us.

The chief waved them aside and stalked on, toward a large building that stood in the center of the plaza. We entered the palm-thatch structure, and our escort of Indians followed after us—the chattering population remaining outside to crowd around the entrance and stare into the dark interior.

I looked at my companions. Marcel had a slight smile as though he was enjoying the experience. Pablo and Antonio were as stony-faced as the savages. My mind was racing, groping wildly for some plan of action. The Indians formed a circle around us, and there we stood, the four of us, stared at by a hundred eyes. Prisoners.

There was a deep gloom inside the big hut. I could see objects hanging above us, but the ridgepole was hidden in darkness and I couldn't make out what the objects were. From outside came the loud and excited chattering of the crowd, which seemed good-natured and not particularly dangerous. The chief and his men squatted on their haunches and stared unblinkingly at us.

Nobody said anything. After a long, tense moment, I heard a gun breech click metallically. It was followed by the rattle of two more breech bolts.

"Wait!" I said hoarsely, staring straight at the chief.

Several Indians stood up and drew back long spears. They poised them over their heads, aiming them at us for a second, and then bringing them to rest at their sides.

The chief got up and walked toward us. Without a word he began to examine us—carefully and minutely—as a scientist might examine some strange new specimen. He felt of our hair and our faces. He opened Marcel's mouth and looked in, as a man looks into the mouth of a horse. He felt of our clothes. He ran his hand over my cartridge belt and clutched the hilt of my knife. Deliberate, unhurried, while the others looked on and we stood immobile, frozen by the situation's tension.

The chief was tugging at the seam of Pablo's trousers, interested, as though he'd never seen clothing before. Marcel muttered to me:

"Is he going to undress us to see if we're made like other people?"

"Shut up, Marcel."

The chief was interested in the guns, but evidently he didn't know what they were. He hefted one, and my heart pounded lest he inadvertently pull the trigger and precipitate a tragedy. But he put it down again. It was Pablo's gun. I could see him breathing a sigh of relief.

Some women and children had crowded into the house. Suddenly the chief became aware of them and ordered them out. That served to break the tension. Each woman, as she reached the doorway, stopped to give us one last quizzical look.



Marcel grinned. "I tell you," he muttered, "they want the old boy to undress us to see if the white man reproduces his race just the same as the Indians do."

Pablo shifted uncomfortably.

"They're hungry," said Antonio.

Marcel looked at Pablo. "He's the one they're after. Nice fat lad. Makes even me hungry."

It was the humor of desperation. My heart pounded more loudly than ever.

Nobody interfered with our talking.

"Keep a straight face," I said. "Don't show fear. We might as well sit down."

We sat on our hammock rolls and nobody objected. The chief had found Marcel's piece of roast venison and was eating it with evident relish. Then he gave instructions to four young bucks, who left the house and ran out of the village, in four different directions.

"Getting help, is he? Or packing his audience." In spite of the situation's obvious danger, I felt more than half like a freak in a side show.

The chief went outside, leaving a circle of men to guard us.

Suddenly I felt hungry—or perhaps merely at a loss for something to do. Act nonchalant! Do something! Anything! The thoughts kept pounding in my brain. I reached for farinha and a cake of brown sugar. Nobody objected and we started eating.

The squatting savages moved closer. One of them, a young buck, walked over to me, peered intently into my pannikin of food, and suddenly reached to snatch it away from me. Instinctively I pushed him away. It was the wrong thing to do, but my nerves were on edge. He jumped back, struggling to keep his balance. There was a stir in the squatting group,

and several men leaped to their feet. For a moment it looked as though the final action had come. But they only stood and glared at us, muttering ominously, and doing nothing.

All afternoon we sat, an armed guard near us, another at the door, and the village population gawking from outside.

"Like monkeys in a cage," said Marcel. Self-consciously we made light conversation. Only Pablo was glum, looking around him nervously and apprehensively.

The swelling life of the village went on, in the spirit of a Roman holiday. Periodically the guard was changed; men who had been inside went out, and new men came in to take their places, squatting by their arms. The gloomy house was filled with the fetid odor of human perspiration.

Late in the afternoon, about six, there was a new note in the life outside. A tom-tom began to beat, rhythmically, suddenly, ominously. We could see through the doorway that large numbers of men were arriving from elsewhere.

The chief came in, looked around, and gave a guttural order. The men who had been watching us got up and went out with him. We were alone in the house. Outside, beyond the doorway, stood half a dozen armed men to make sure we didn't escape.

The tom-tom boomed unceasingly.

"Something's up. Some kind of ceremony coming."

There was no occasion to talk. With nobody near to watch us, there was no need to make a pretense of bravery. Beads of sweat stood out on our foreheads. There was nothing to be said.

In a moment the chief returned with his escort of warriors. They had covered their faces and their bodies with new designs of black and white paint—weird, grotesque, inhuman.

"Something's up. If they start to tie us up, or make a move to torture us, make a break for the guns."

I saw Pablo twitching. His nerves were at the snapping point and I could see that he was on the verge of reaching for his rifle then and there.

"Careful," warned Marcel. "We don't know what they intend. They may mean us no harm."

The tom-tom boomed outside. Time went on. The chief and his men were simply in the hut, doing nothing, looking eerie and incredibly savage in their grotesque patterns of paint. Again we felt the tension easing. The chief went outside. We began to talk freely again, and to make ghoulish, desperate jokes. There was perhaps a note of hysteria in our laughter. The Indians stared curiously at us every time we raised our voices to laugh.

"That's the stuff," said Marcel. "Show the bastards that we aren't worried."

Three men entered the building, the chief and two newcomers. It was dark by now, and the house's only illumination came from the fires outside.

The three went over to Pablo and began to examine him again, systematically and minutely. They felt his arms, his legs, his chest, and his stomach. They repeated the performance on each of us, and then they stood aside to talk together.

"I told you, you're the fattest," Marcel said to Pablo.

I was tired, and suddenly I didn't give a damn what anybody said or did. Fumbling in the darkness, I pulled my hammock out of the duffel bag. With it came the flashlight.

"I'm going to hang up my hammock. I want to lie down."

The others stooped over to get out their own hammocks. The Indians did not object.

I turned on the flashlight to tie the hammock to one of

the poles, and suddenly there was commotion in the house. Exclaiming gutturally, all the Indians jumped back in excitement.

For a moment I stood in surprise and indecision.

"Flash it at them," whispered Marcel urgently. "That gets them."

I turned off the light, turned around to aim it at the Indians, and suddenly snapped it on again. They blinked in the brilliant glare, backed up, and covered their faces with their hands.

"That does the trick," said Marcel. "That might save our lives. Don't let them get it away from you."

I turned the light off and could see the chief coming toward me. He reached out for the flashlight, and quickly I turned it on, full in his face. Startled, he jumped back.

I swept the light around the house, and each time it hit an Indian, he edged toward the door. They stared at us in fright, and covered their faces when the light hit them directly. I could see them glancing at the chief as though to take their cues from him. I turned the light full on the chief. He covered his own eyes, edged backward a few steps, and then, suddenly, turned his back on us and walked majestically out the door.

All the men followed. Again we were alone in the house.

There was a moment of deep silence.

"That got them," said Marcel. "That's got them on the run. We've got to follow up quick, now. We ought to make a break for it right now, before they have time ——"

"No, no. No shooting. There's too many of them. More magic. More magic. That gets them."

I started to walk outside with the flashlight, the guards at

the door shifting nervously at my first move. Excitedly Antonio called to me:

"Senhor. Senhor. The fireworks. The Roman candles."

The Roman candles! My brain was racing. Do it now! Do it now! They're still confused outside. Follow up while the following is good.

I took the flashlight in one hand and a Roman candle in the other.

"Come along. You fellows follow me in single file. Don't stumble. Don't run. Don't show fear. Walk normally."

The guards outside blocked the doorway. I flashed the light at them and they fell away. In single file we marched resolutely into the plaza. It was filled with men, fingering their spears and their clubs. I kept the flashlight on, describing great arcs with the beam of light. The tom-tom died down. Savages blocked all means of escape from the village, but nobody made a move to molest us.

Gravely we walked down the plaza some fifty feet. Ostentatiously we stopped. There was a sea of faces all around us, men, women, children, painted and unpainted, some staring in silence, some chattering excitedly. They crowded in and I pushed them back with the light. They came in from another direction and I swung the light over there.

Caught by the eerie, dramatic moment, I felt no trace of fear, except that tension of stage fright that grips a lecturer at the moment of facing a large audience. Would the act go over? It was up to us.

"Take it easy," whispered Marcel. "You've got them. Don't be in a hurry."

Deliberately I lit a match and held it to the fuse. The talk died away as hundreds of eyes stared at us out of the night, illuminated only by the flickering campfires. I had turned out

the flashlight. I held the Roman candle in my hand. The fuse sputtered.

Suddenly a great terror came over me. What if this thing was a dud? What if it didn't go off at all? My hand began to shake as the fuse sputtered on. It seemed to burn for an hour. I could see Marcel and Antonio and Pablo staring at it. That little sparkle at the end of a powdered string became the center of my universe. Only dimly was I aware of the savage audience.

A murmur began to go around among the Indians as nothing happened. They were becoming uneasy, shifting nervously, grunting. And then, suddenly, things began to happen.

With a burst came the first explosion, and a radiant cascade of stars spouted upward and curved down again to earth. Out came a red ball, sailing gracefully over the crowd, a green one, a blue one, a yellow one, a red one again, in an endless procession, popping as they emerged, accompanied by the hissing stars.

There was one awe-struck moment. Then a roar came from the assembled Chavantes. They split the silence of the village with fear-stricken cries, the heavy gutturals of the men mingling with the sharp voices of the women. They pushed back in terror, knocking each other down in their hurry to reach the back shadows, trampling each other, yelling, as the coruscating stream of fire shed a blaze of varicolored light over the teeming plaza. The men stared as though they were witnessing some unearthly spectacle not meant for human eyes, and the women cringed in abject fear—the whole crowd pushing backward, the children at the outer edge running into the houses with loud screams.

Then the Roman candle died down with a hiss. Darkness descended on the plaza again, and with it silence.

For a moment we stood, irresolute. Then we turned toward our house and marched into it, steadily, looking neither to right nor to left.

We rolled into our hammocks. Eventually the chief appeared at the door, uncertainly. He stood there without entering. More men came to join him. They stood guard out there all night, but nobody came in.

## Chapter XX

WE PREPARED for the night and for what sleep we might snatch—the revolver, the flashlight, the rifles, the Roman candles all near, to be handy in case of need. Across the doorway squatted half a dozen figures of armed men, sent to guard us. The dying embers of the fire outside sent in fitful glares of light, to trace weird patterns on the floor. Out in the village the tom-tom was silent. Men and women were moving about, but they talked almost in whispers. The excitement was gone.

Exhausted, we dozed, only to wake with a start every few minutes.

“What’s that?” I heard Antonio’s hoarse whisper.

I strained my ears. There was no sound except from the guards at the door, carrying on a conversation.

“Nothing, Antonio. Only the guards talking.”

“Do you think they’re planning something? What are they saying?”

“How the hell do I know what they’re saying? Try to go to sleep.”

“Hadn’t we better keep guard?”

The warriors had stopped talking. They were evidently listening to us.

“You can if you want to. I’m going to sleep.”

I dozed off once more, jumpy, worried. There was no telling what would happen, no telling how we stood with the Indians. They were a complete enigma to me, as was our



position. Obviously they had never had contact with white men before; obviously, too, we had impressed them. But how? We had startled and perhaps scared them with a dramatic show, but what did that mean to them? Would we henceforth be deified creatures? I had read books and seen movies, like everybody else; I had heard mysterious rumors of the "White God of the Jungles" variety; they had had an appealing, romantic ring, but now I was too close to the thing for comfort. Magic and all that kind of thing. It wears off after a while. We were bound to show our clay feet in the long run, and then what would happen? Temporarily we seemed to have the savages awed, but how would they act when they discovered that we were only men like themselves—and peculiarly helpless men at that—in that environment?

I fell asleep with my mind in a turmoil, sweating with fears for the next day. For the time being there was only one thing to do—carry on with the show.

And then something happened that changed the entire aspect of things. That same night I was to discover that I had figured the Indians all wrong. If they had superstitions, about us or anything else, they had no reverence to go with them. From that same night on I was to learn to know them—in so far as it was possible to know them—as a rather odd rural population of thoroughly practical, devil-may-care, intensely curious, laughter-loving, and always ribald men and women. I don't know yet what happened that night—I still don't know the Indians well enough for that. One moment they were a crowd of Hollywood savages, putting on a thoroughly convincing Hollywood act—especially in response to *our* show; the next time I awoke they were as casual as if I were an old friend to whom they needn't pay

any special attention whatever. It baffles me still, when I think of it.

As I said, I went to sleep. How long I slept I don't know. That I slept deeply this time is certain. And then, suddenly, I was awake again. With a start. I felt the heat of a fire, and its glare was in my eyes.

I smelled smoke. I heard voices. I craned my neck, and there sat half a dozen Indians, the paint still on their bodies, unconcernedly squatting about a fire in our house. The smoke spread everywhere; some escaped through the door, and some through a hole in the roof, at the back. The men just sat there, chatting, as though we didn't exist.

I watched them through half-open eyes. There were two women in the group, tending the fire and evidently cooking something. Cooking a meal at three in the morning. A family gathering, as though all hell hadn't popped out of a Roman candle only a few hours before. It didn't add up, somehow.

Fearful lest somebody should see that I was awake, I closed my eyes and feigned sleep. I needn't have. The savages went on chattering and laughing, talking, arguing, grunting, as though it were the most ordinary thing in the world to be doing it in the house in which three white gods were asleep.

I squinted at them again, confused thoughts racing through my mind. Three white gods! A lot of respect these heathens were showing to us supernatural creatures who had just scared the living daylight out of them in the plaza. There they sat—roasting—what was it they were roasting anyway? I stirred and leaned over to look. Some of the Indians looked toward me, saw my interest, but turned to the fire and each other again. They weren't interested.

What was it they were cooking? For a moment I had a fright. It couldn't be! No, this was a monkey. Don't tell

me they're cannibals. But that small, white, human-looking figure had given me a start.

By now I was fully awake. Should I let them ignore me like that? Not healthy. Not at all healthy. Something ought to be done.

Nonchalantly I got out of my hammock and walked over to the fire. My three companions stirred uneasily in their sleep. The squatting Indians glanced at me carelessly and went on about their business. I was getting the cold shoulder. I was left stranded and at a loss for action, in the dancing shadows outside that ring of humans. They didn't even have their weapons with them. White god, indeed!

I couldn't just stand there and be snubbed. Neither could I crawl back to my hammock in defeat. I had to do something to keep face. But what? Uncertainly, making the best of a situation, I strolled to the door and stood there, looking out at the moonlit plaza. The guards were still there. They looked up, grunted, and edged aside to let me pass. *The White God of the Chavantes!* The anticlimax was almost more than I could stand.

Across the plaza, a figure came out of one of the houses and walked toward me. It turned out to be the chief, still in ferocious war paint.

He walked up to me with perfect poise, put his hand on my arm, and said something—smiling. Weeks later, after I had learned a little of the language, I realized that he had said "Tik-an-toe," which means "good friend." His manner was friendly and unabashed. I imitated his action and repeated his word as closely as I could. He seemed pleased and led me to the fire, sitting down and making a place for me next to himself. The others moved aside for me. They were as casual as though I'd been with them every day for years.

I was invited to a feast, but I wasn't sure that I relished it. The monkey didn't look too appetizing. Pretty soon it would be done and then things would be expected of me. If only I had some coffee.

I turned to the shadows where the others were sleeping.

"Marcel," I called in a hoarse whisper.

There was a start, and a figure shot up in the dark, rubbing his eyes.

"Marcel, could you get some coffee?"

He stared in surprise at the scene, at me, sitting next to the chief like an old pal.

"What are you doing? What's going on?"

Antonio and Pablo woke too. The savages made room for them. They squatted around the fire with us, blinking in surprise. The Indians watched with interest as Marcel got out the pot and put the coffee on to boil. They talked among themselves, probably commenting on the strange ways of the white man. There was some comfort in being able to talk in a language that they didn't know.

"We aren't white gods at all," I said to the others. "We're just a lot of cranks with funny habits who came barging into their village. By now they seem to think we're harmless. We're going to have to be polite, though, and eat part of that monkey."

The coffee was boiling and I took a sip out of the first cup to show it wasn't poisoned. Then I handed the cup to the chief. He sniffed at it, studied it, examined the cup's handle with profound interest, took a sip, looked up, looked around, seemed pleased, took another sip, smacked his lips, and then, suddenly, lifted the cup and downed all the coffee in one great gulp.

I saw Pablo stare at him in astonishment. "If he burns his

throat—the old boy seems to like it—what a man—he's lined with copper."

Another cup of coffee made the rounds, each man taking a sip—and evidently liking it.

After a while the monkey was "done," taken off the fire, and placed on a mat of leaves. Each man tore off a piece, we also. It was stringy, half raw, and bloody. I felt revulsion but I choked it down. So did the rest.

I handed my knife to the chief. He looked at it curiously, without knowing its use. I showed him how to cut meat with it and he seemed delighted. He went to work after that, slicing up the rest of the monkey.

Somebody pulled yams out of the embers. Monkey meat and roasted yams. After some weeks in the village we were to consider that an excellent breakfast. That first one was interesting, exciting in its strangeness, but hardly palatable.

When the meal was over, most of the Indians went outside. The chief began to doze. We sat and smoked. It was about five in the morning. Daylight was not far off.

With the coming of the sun the village took on new life. People of both sexes and all ages went past on the plaza, going about their work or just loafing. They all stared at us, but we were not molested. After a while the chief came out of our house. He led us to a one-room house, back of his own hut. He indicated that it was to be ours. Then he pointed to the trail by which we had come, and shook his head. We were not to go that way. We were not to leave. But there was no malice in his gestures. He acted like a man who was used to being obeyed and didn't need to emphasize his orders with dramatics. We were prisoners, but apparently we were not to be ill-treated.

Some of the Indians carried our belongings into the new





house. Later we were to discover that the other one, the one in which we had been lodged the first night, was a kind of ceremonial structure, the nearest thing to a temple, the place where the Indians had their great celebrations, where they kept their costumes and ceremonial trappings, and where they usually painted themselves for special occasions.

It was evident that we would not be able to escape from the Chavantes for some time. Our every move was watched, if only from curiosity. When we were in our house, half a dozen men, women and children invariably squatted by the door, looking us over. When we appeared on the plaza we were followed around. We couldn't take a step, or do a thing, without an audience.

We hung our hammocks and lolled in them as we held a council of war, with half the population gawking at us. Pablo was still jittery.

"I don't like it," he said. "What are these savages going to do with us? I want to get out of here. I want to go back. I've got a girl ——"

Marcel laughed at him. "You've got all the girls you want, right here. Look at them. Take your pick. Look at that nice little yellow job that's scratching her back against the door-post, ogling you. You're the boy they like."

I interrupted the bantering. "Understand this right now. We're not fooling with these women. Leave them alone."

Everybody agreed but Marcel. He looked astonished. "What will the Indians think of us? Four big healthy men—and they leave the women alone? The Indians'll think we're crazy. I knew of a missionary once ——"

"Never mind the missionary. Leave the women alone. That's an order."



Pablo and Antonio agreed with me. Marcel shrugged his shoulders and promised to obey.

We didn't know how long we would be likely to be prisoners. For life, probably, if the Chavantes had anything to say about it. Our only chance for escape would be by way of our boat. Sometime, after the savages had become used to us and relaxed their vigilance, we might be able to make a break and reach the boat. The Chavantes were not river Indians. They were landmen who had no canoes. There lay our only hope for salvation.

"The boat ought to be pulled up so it won't drift off at high water. It has to be left shipshape or we're here for life."

Pablo laughed bitterly. "Yes, these people are likely to let us go down there, aren't they?"

"I'm not so sure. Our baggage. We've got a lot of stuff there that the chief might want. Presents. We're not paupers. I'm going to try him."

I had heard some of the Indians use the word "Maharon" several times when talking to the chief. Perhaps it was his name. I turned to a buck who was placidly squatting in our house, and said, "Maharon, Maharon." The Indian went out and returned with the chief.

A dozen men crowded around as we had our palaver. I pointed to our luggage, then in the direction of the river, made motions of carrying things, and pointed to some of the Indians who stood gaping, taking in the pantomime. The chief shook his head, but it was evident that he hadn't understood me. I went through the performance again, and he seemed to get angry. Perhaps he thought that I wanted to get away. If so, he thought right, but that wasn't what I was trying to tell him. I tried it the third time, and finally he understood. He wasn't at all averse. In the end he dis-

patched twenty Indians to go to the boat with Antonio and Marcel.

Pablo and I settled down to our housekeeping. A number of women came into the house, some alone, some with their men, and some with their children, and made themselves at home. Some brought the food that they were preparing for their next meal, and cooked it over our fire, to eat it then and there or to take it back to their own houses. Some brought their spinning. They squatted on our floor, spinning heavy cords from palm-leaf fibers; from these they eventually made hammocks. They squatted in front of our house and watched every move.

But they came with presents too. They brought us yams, sweet potatoes, boiled peanuts, plantains, and several bunches of bananas. We were evidently going to be treated well.

I showed them salt. They had never before either seen or tasted it, and it was with great difficulty that I persuaded the chief to try some. When he did, however, it was a great success. He smacked his lips and asked for more. Others crowded around and wanted some too. Each got a pinch, and after that, throughout the rest of our stay in the village, salt became our currency, with which we could buy almost anything but our freedom.

Marcel and Antonio returned in a few days with their escort and the luggage. Everything had gone well. The boat was safe and pulled up, out of high-water reach. The journey had been pleasant, with no untoward incidents.

In the next few days life began to take on a placid, even tenor, ruffled only as our nerves occasionally gave way to the strain of uncertainty, or the strain of having a constant audience. We discussed that audience often.

"You'd think they'd get tired of just sitting there, watching us."

"Maybe it isn't just curiosity. Maybe they're being neighborly. They seem to sit just like that in each other's houses too. Everybody's house is everybody else's."

"That's what I think," said Marcel, who was always realistic. "It isn't because we're curiosities that they sit here. It's because they've accepted us. That night with the Roman candle—they'd been trying to scare us with their war paint and hocus-pocus, but we scared them instead. We gave them a good show and we showed that we weren't afraid. They like that. Everybody likes that."

"I don't know. How do you know what goes on in the minds of people like these? Maybe so, maybe not. I wish I knew where we stand."

We built a veranda for our house, and we made stools and benches. By agreement we made no motion to leave the village in any direction. We hoped someday to be invited on hunting trips, but decided it was best to wait till the invitation came from the chief. We took turns with the cooking, buying our food with salt. A handful of salt would buy a whole bunch of bananas or an armful of yams. We learned to shave ourselves every day—not through any white-man's-burden notion of keeping up morale in the wilderness, but because that was the only way we could prevent the Indians from pulling the hairs out of our faces in a spirit of cooperation and friendship. They constantly pulled their own hairs out, over their entire bodies, except on the tops of their heads.

By pointing to objects, we got them to tell us their names. So, little by little, we began to build up a vocabulary of the Chavante language.

There was nothing especially wrong with the life, except for its boredom.

"My God," Pablo would complain. "What do these people do all the time? Eat, sleep, and loaf. What a gang. They eat when they please, they sleep when they please, and they loaf the rest of the time. It's a barbarity. It's uncivilized. These people aren't any better than animals."

Pablo's nerves were the thinnest, and Marcel's the thickest.

Marcel laughed at him. "There's something to be said for the life. And you underrate the Indians. Who planted the garden where they caught us? Who built this village? Who keeps it clean? You have to admit it isn't dirty. Who made their bows and arrows? There's *some* work going on here, only you haven't seen it yet. And you can't tell. They may know more than you think. They may know a lot of things that they haven't told us about. Some of these Indians have secrets. I knew of a Frenchman once—he went among some wild Indians like these as a kind of missionary. He was a doctor and he was going to help them because they were just like animals. Well, he stayed with them as a student. He stayed to learn. He said the savages knew more about medicine than he did."

Pablo sneered at the idea. "Look at them. Animals. They haven't even grace enough to be superstitious. Do they have a religion—even a heathen one? Don't tell me. They're too low for that. Don't talk to *me* about their secrets." Pablo seemed annoyed, at times, over the letdown of not being a white god after all.

I thought of the German butterfly collector I had met in Iquitos, but somehow his words didn't seem to make sense. Perhaps he had come in contact with Indians up there who were higher in the social scale than these Chavantes. These

happy-go-lucky, laughter-loving, childish savages—what could *they* know about mysterious drugs? I was inclined to hold with Pablo's view of them.

And then, less than a week after our arrival in the village, we were to have a glimpse of native lore that upset all our ideas.

There was a commotion around one of the village houses. A gaping crowd stood there, talking with some excitement. We joined it to see what was up, and eventually we were given to understand that a man lay dying in there. Messengers had been sent on the run to fetch a medicine man from the next village, two hours' travel away. In the house the dying man's wife and two other women were brewing something in a large clay pot. Near them was a pile of the beaten pieces of the trunk and leaves of some jungle vine, which they were throwing into the pot.

I pointed to the brew, questioning.

"High-ya-waska," said one of the women without interrupting her stirring.

High-ya-waska. There it was again! The stuff the German had talked about in Iquitos. Evidently the word was an international one, found in a lot of widely differing Indian languages—like curare, or arrow poison, like *telephone* in civilized languages. High-ya-waska. I became excited. Would it work? Was it really telepathic? But still the scene didn't make sense—didn't come up to preconceived notions. I had been thinking in terms of secret, sinister poisons, jealously guarded from the white man, prepared only by witch doctors and other initiates, to the tune of palpitating tom-toms, war paint, and all kinds of mystic hocus-pocus. Here, with a man dying in a near-by hammock, were just a few naked women, unconcernedly brewing the stuff as though they were cook-

ing dinner, with half the population looking on in idle curiosity.

Something struck me as funny; among the Chavantes you couldn't help seeing the funny side of things. I was reminded of a certain wisecracking mayor of New York, who had bought some fancy snow-removal machines for the city. "They're wonderful machines," the mayor had said. "Wonderful. And they don't throw anybody out of work. It takes two men to run them, and fifty men to watch them being run."

That was the way it was with the Chavantes and their witch's brew of sinister poisons.

On this particular occasion I had no opportunity to check up on the drug's effect. I was too new in the village, wasn't yet sure enough of myself to go around asking too many questions, and didn't yet know the Chavante language. Later, however, I discovered more about it.

It is a bitter drink, and about three spoonfuls is a safe dose for a healthy man. More is likely to prove fatal. It induces a deep stupor, during which the spirit is said to leave the body and to visit the souls of the departed in the spirit world. Hence its use at funerals.

In modern terminology, the drug is said to excite certain portions of the brain, thus producing telepathic visions—or to bring the "unconscious" to the surface with the same result. I don't know about that. But I do know that in the weeks to follow, several Indians came out of high-ya-waska sleeps and described scenes to me that sounded very much like modern cities.

"Ahn-wirra, ahn-wirra, ahn-wirra—house, house, house—many houses, houses everywhere, tall—high—to the clouds—many people, people like ants, people everywhere."

Where did the Chavantes get that description? They had no contact with whites, and we four were probably the first white men they had seen.

"Black objects, moving. Moving by themselves. Nobody pushing or pulling. People riding in them. Many black objects between the houses, all moving."

Where did they get that picture of an automobile?

Once I tried high-ya-waska myself. It was a terrifying experience, but there was no telepathy. Or was there? I drank the stuff and went under quickly. I remember that during the intervening moment of consciousness I seemed unusually aware of things, and highly elated. My mind was everywhere, saw everything around me, but my body was held in a deep languor. My eyes were open and alert, but everything took on a peculiar blue color. The Indians were blue, the house was blue, the clouds, the patch of sky visible through the doorway were blue, the foliage of the trees was a fine, shimmering cobalt. And then it faded, and I drifted off to sleep.

There was a nightmare, which I remembered all two vividly after waking. I was in the midst of a violent electrical storm, with crashing thunder, and bright, flashing bolts. One of the lightning bolts picked me up and carried me through the black sky, rushing at tremendous velocity over a mysterious jungle and turbulent rivers. And then, suddenly, the bolt of lightning on which I was riding burst into a million stars, and I began falling among them into the black terrors below. I woke before I landed—in a cold sweat.

It wasn't telepathy. Or was it? I didn't know and I don't know yet. For weeks I strained my mind to remember details of that jungle and those rivers over which I had ridden the storm, but the picture remained confused, grandiose, terrifying. But was there telepathy? Who can tell? The Cha-

vantes had gone under and had come out of their trance babbling in vaguely descriptive terms about *my* country, *my* cities. That deep, mysterious jungle and those rushing rivers—they were the Chavantes' country to which I was a stranger.

I never tried the experiment again—I was afraid to and I would probably be afraid today. But I hope that some scientist interests himself in high-ya-waska.

The medicine man arrived in midafternoon, when the high-ya-waska was ready. He went into the house where the sick man lay, but did not, so far as I could see, even glance at the patient.

Now we four were among the gapers outside the house, as curious, as interested, as any of the savages.

The medicine man sat on the floor and began to chant, occasionally swinging his body from side to side, keeping his eyes on the ground. For an hour and a half he kept up the raucous, unvarying chant, which eventually began to send chills up and down my spine through its very repetitive monotony. How could a man do that—over and over and over, on and on without variations, chanting that same simple tune that fastened itself maddeningly on my consciousness after the first five minutes and then wouldn't let go—then kept insisting, kept stirring around inside of me until I wanted to yell? But I sat there and gawked—motionless—too fascinated to squirm.

Finally, abruptly, he stopped, and you could have cut the silence with a knife. The patient's wife carried a dose of high-ya-waska to him in a gourd-shell cup. He drank it and started his chant again, with a little more vigor and determination—as though struggling to fight off the drug's effects. Then he toppled over and slept.



He wakened in half an hour and said something, in grave, stentorian measures. Later I was told that he had announced that the patient was going to die. The medicine man had tried to persuade the evil spirit to leave the other's body, but the spirit had refused.

In the months to come I saw several such ceremonies. Always the medicine man was right. The patient recovered whenever the spirit consented to go away, and died whenever it didn't.

The man was dead the next morning. When we arrived at the house the body had been made ready for interment. The face had been painted with red and white designs. The long hair had been cut. The soles of the feet and the tips of the fingers were bright red, and downy feathers were glued with pitch—the milk of the rubber tree—to the hair, the backs of the hands, and the insteps. That was done so that the spirit could fly away. "Only birds fly," the chief explained to me later.

The grave was dug in the center of the man's house, and over it hung the body, tied in the hammock which he had used in life. The women were busy all day, preparing food, raw and cooked, and placing it in the open grave. Not till that job was done, toward sundown, did the widow start her lamentations. She wept and wailed all night, her cries sounding like the howling of a dog. At sunrise she was exhausted, and the brother of the deceased took up the lamentations. He howled all day, till sundown, and then the real ceremonies started.

People flocked into the house. Drums began to roll and thunder until their deep reverberations made the ground tremble. All the Indians began to dance and sing. They were crowded around, inside the hut and out, hopping about and

chanting, in tune with the rhythm of the drums, out of tune with it, sometimes calmly and placidly, sometimes rising to wild pitches of excitement, dancing furiously and screeching in loud wails—like the individuals who are “taken” in Negro revival-meetings in our South. On and on they went, with the drums rolling incessantly, the stench from the dancers’ bodies rising in the house, and mingling with the odor of the cadaver, already beginning to decompose in the tropical heat.

Not till daybreak was the cadaver lowered into the grave and covered. The crowd dispersed. We walked “home” across the plaza. I said to Pablo:

“Now what do you think of their superstitions? Too stupid to be superstitious, are they?”

He shivered. He was pale and had evidently been deeply affected by the whole barbaric ritual.

“What animals, no? What a barbarity. It’s inhuman, I tell you. It’s an abomination. It should be stopped. What beasts!”

Pablo, the most devoutly religious of us all, had the greatest difficulty in adjusting himself. Marcel already felt at home among the Chavantes, but Pablo struggled against it with all his strength. It was weeks before he was able to take things in his stride. And even then he would occasionally realize with a great shock that he was beginning to like the life, and suddenly put up a desperate fight against such liking—as if it were something unworthy of a civilized and Christian gentleman.

Many a time I was to see Pablo apparently enjoying himself hugely, singing songs to the Indians, gossiping with them, telling them stories, eating with them, dancing with them, only to be seized with remorse later, wrestle with the devils inside himself, cast them out, and then go around heaping

bitter vituperations on the savages for being lower than the beasts of the jungle.

But he couldn't get away from them, and there was nothing he could do about it. He became like a burning, unstable missionary, who vacillates emotionally between carrying the banner of his holy crusade and "going native" with equal fervor. But, until the pendulum swung the other way, he always went native with charm and enthusiastic abandon. He was a great favorite among the Indians—by far the most popular of us all.

## Chapter XXI

THE village life settled down again to its normal routine, and time passed like a sluggish river—broad and deep, muddy and unclear. We could see neither beginning nor end—only that placid, unfathomable primitive existence flowing past our house with its minor eddies and whirlpools that reached down nobody knew how far, that came from nobody knew where, and were carried down to some unimaginably distant sea. We were still confined to the village. Nobody asked us to see the surrounding countryside, and we bided our time.

We gathered a pile of wood every evening, and made a fire in front of our house. It became a kind of community gathering place. Dozens of Indians came every day with their bananas, yams, sweet potatoes, and green corn, roasted their food in our fire, and ate it there, picnic fashion. Then, one night, the spirit moved them and they began to sing in a nasal monotone. Then Marcel struck up a Brazilian song, Antonio and Pablo joining him. The Indians were fascinated and asked for more. My three companions sang again, and the Indians sang again. And then it was indicated that it was my turn.

I know nothing about music, and my voice has frightening aspects, even to myself. But there was a magic in the evening that I couldn't resist. I could think of only one song, a piece of tripe that had once been popular. I plunged into it, trying to make up with enthusiasm for what was undoubtedly a horrible off-key rendition. The song was "Cuddle Up a Little Closer, Baby Mine."

My three white companions looked startled, though, of course, they were polite enough to applaud. But the Chavantes—the Chavantes loved it. They wanted an encore, and they got the same song over again. They asked for it again the following night, and the night after that. Marcel and Pablo and Antonio looked pained, but the savages had to be pleased.

“Cuddle Up a Little Closer, Baby Mine.” They heard it again and again, and after a while they picked up the tune, and then the words—or something as near the tune and the words as they could get.

“Cuddle Up a Little Closer, Baby Mine.” I could begin to understand the satisfaction that unscrupulous frontiersmen get out of teaching civilized vices to the savages. Here was a vice that I could teach with complete abandon. I coached them in it, and soon I had half a dozen men singing it. I could imagine some future ethnologist “discovering” those Indians as we had discovered them, being dragged into the ceremonial hut, guarded, frightened, being held prisoner, hearing the tom-toms beating outside, seeing the Indians in their war paint—fierce, savage, barbaric, seeing them dance around what he believes to be the torture fire, and hearing them sing—“Cuddle Up a Little Closer, Baby Mine.”

As we learned more and more of the language, I began to suspect that we were not, after all, the first white men with whom these people had had contact. Somebody had been among them before, some Frenchman. He had not been there recently, that was sure. But what did time mean? Perhaps a hundred or two hundred years ago—a missionary or two—who knows? Some Frenchman, however. For “that will do” or “stop” the naked savages said “tiens, tiens” with a pure

French nasal accent and in a first-class Parisian manner. And for any sharp-edged thing they said "couteau."

We had little to do except learn the language, and as the days went by it became easier to talk to them. We could discover about three hundred and thirty words. The verbs were limited and the pronunciation was difficult, especially the gutturals and the odd inflections. Many words had several meanings. Ahn-wirra meant house, and also village. Pe, pronounced pay, meant foot. Pe, pe, pe was to walk. Pe, pe, pe, pe, pe was a long walk, and the more pes there were, the longer the trip.

Ahn-ket and numerous pes indicated that one walked all day, slept, and walked the next day. The number of ahn-kets indicated the number of days. The Chavantes could count only to twenty, which was done with the fingers and toes. A large quantity was indicated by touching the hair.

Sometimes it was difficult to keep our minds on our business and on our self-imposed rules for virtue. There were some beautiful young girls in the village, light in color, with deep, languorous eyes and lustrous black hair, well shaped, with firmly rounded breasts. And they crowded around the evening fire, and they watched us. Some watched us more freely and more openly than others—especially Marcel and Pablo. Marcel could take it in his stride, but Pablo rose to new heights of performance when he was aware of his female audiences, strutted like a pouter pigeon, and then at night, when we were alone in the house, became confused and bitter in his talk about the savages.

Only the chiefs and the subchiefs of the Chavantes married. Maharon was chief of our village and of three others within a radius of ten miles. Then there was a subchief for each house, ruling the seven or eight families that lived under

the same roof with him. He saw that the house was provided with food by sending the men out to hunt and fish and to work in the plantations.

Ordinary men were permitted to have one woman each, but had no recourse if the woman wanted to leave for somebody else.

There was a curious round cage at one end of the plaza, raised some seven or eight feet from the ground. No man ever went near it, and a few women were nearly always squatting in it. Eventually we discovered that all Chavante women were sent to this pen during their menstrual periods. The Indians believed that any man who came in contact with a woman during that time would become effeminate and lose his courage.

There was a curious, if heroic, custom at childbirth. Immediately after the baby was born, the mother was stretched on the ground and the husband sat on her abdomen for eight to ten hours. Doctors have since told me that this practice has some therapeutic value. The ordeal over, the Indian mothers have no period of repose, but get up immediately and go about their work.

As in other Amazonian Indian tribes, orphans had no standing whatever. There was an unfortunate youth, about fifteen years old, whose name was Mahnweel. He was an orphan, neglected and abused. He had no woman to make a hammock for him, so he slept on the ground wherever he could. He had no plantation, and ate anything that was thrown to him as to a dog. He had a horrible, festering sore on his leg. Long before, he had been wounded by a sting ray, and nobody took the trouble to treat the wound. He was no fool, but he was treated like the village idiot, the butt of all the jokes and of the coarsest abuse. We showed him what kindness we could,



The Citadel of Machu Picchu, the great city high in the Andes, was lost centuries, until its ruins were discovered in 1912. The city stands 2000 feet above the canyon below; its streets, squares, altars, dwellings, and fortifications were of stone, all of which had to be carried up the mountain.





and he hung around our house a lot. However, he made no complaints. He seemed to accept his fate as a natural thing, almost as a profession, the way a medieval court jester might accept *his*.

The Chavantes, I was to discover, were neither particularly kind nor particularly ferocious. They were merely completely natural, with few restraints on their behavior. They could rise to superb heights of friendliness and kindly consideration for others, they could show the most touching love for others and especially for their children—and the next moment they could give vent to an almost orgiastic bestiality. Their treatment of Mahnweel was only indicative of the cruelty of which they were capable.

After I began to go afield with them on hunting trips I discovered another side of their character. When they were in the bush, away from their women, they constantly committed acts of perversion in the most natural, unself-conscious manner imaginable, devising new tricks and laughing with glee as they did it.

Our release from the constrictions of village life was accompanied by a new triumph that did much to enhance our standing.

Maharon had a small daughter, a pretty little thing, to whom he was deeply devoted. She was about four years old, and spent most of her time with her father, walking about with him or being carried proudly on his shoulders. Maharon's usual stony and blank expression left his face when he was with her or talked about her. A tender light came into his eyes, and a half-smile curled about his lips.

Then, one day, the little girl fell ill. The medicine man came, and chanted, and blew smoke over all her body, but it did no good. She began to have convulsions daily, and no-

body had any hope for her. Maharon had no expression on his face, but it was easy to see that he was deeply affected.

We discussed the girl in our house.

"I know what's the matter with her," I said to Marcel. "She's got worms. She's got them bad, and if they don't do something soon, she'll die."

Marcel looked alarmed. "You keep out of this. Don't you touch her."

"I know. But I can cure her. I can save her life."

"You keep your nose out of things. Supposing you don't cure her. Supposing she dies. It'll be our fault and they'll kill us."

"I know all that. But I'm certain I can cure her. I'm willing to take the risk."

"All right, damn it. Supposing you do. What then? You'll be a great man around here, but you've muscled in on the medicine man's racket. He's no fool. What's he going to say to that? Even Maharon can't protect you against a shot of poison from the witch doctor."

There was something to what Marcel said, and Pablo was vehement in agreeing with him. Nevertheless, I was unable to keep out. Those convulsions and that potbelly—it couldn't be anything but an aggravated case of worms. Finally, rashly, I indicated to the chief that I thought I could help the girl.

He turned glowing eyes on me, clutched my arm, and pushed me inside the hut. I shook my head. I got him to understand that I must have complete charge. Nobody must go near her, nobody must feed her, until I gave the word. Maharon looked uncertain for a moment; the witch doctor glared at me. But finally my terms were agreed to.

I went to our house for my medicine kit containing the worm medicine. "You fool," said Pablo bitterly. But Marcel

had removed his objections, as I knew he would, once the decision was definitely made.

"I'll go over there with you," he said, very simply. I was grateful to him. I felt that this was the most dangerous act of my life, and my heart was pounding wildly.

Marcel and I went to the chief's house, where we asked all the others except Maharon and the witch doctor to go outside. Toward the latter we were as friendly and as complimentary as possible. Courteously and with many gestures, I tried to explain to him that one people has one medicine, and another another, that one medicine works for one thing, and another for another. I showed him my medicine kit. We were professionals together. We should work together. We should trade secrets. If my cure worked, I would give him the secret, but I would expect him to give me one of his in return.

Marcel helped eagerly, practically fawning on the man with admiration. No use making an enemy out of a witch doctor. Not out of a witch doctor. That was always bad medicine. Little by little, as though in spite of himself, the old boy came around to the point where he was almost civil. We indicated that he might keep on blowing herb smoke over the girl, but he preferred to sit back and watch us work. He was no mean politician himself. If something went wrong he wanted to be able to put the whole blame on us.

We sat and watched all afternoon, doing precisely nothing, the girl moaning and occasionally writhing in horrible convulsions. Maharon sat stony-faced in the hut. What was he thinking? Who knew? Outside stood the eternal crowd, gaping into the hut's half-dark.

Near sundown a woman came with food for the girl. We motioned her away and she looked amazed and indignant. She turned a questioning glance on the chief. He merely

grunted and told her to get out. There was still no telling what he thought. Perhaps he had faith in us, and perhaps not. He was willing to give us our chance unhindered. The strain began to tell on Marcel and me. Beads of sweat stood out on our foreheads. We made a fire and brewed some coffee. The girl drank it eagerly. The worms made her hungry and she asked for more to eat. We shook our heads. She began to cry pitifully for more to eat. Her father told her to be quiet. There was a murmur in the crowd outside. In illness or health, the Chavantes thought that children should be given whatever they wanted. The medicine man squatted and watched, his face as expressionless as that of the chief.

Marcel and I took turns staying awake, watching all night that nobody should give her food. We would have welcomed it had the medicine man practiced his incantations. The nerve-racking thing, to us, to the people outside, to the chief, was this enforced inactivity—pretending to cure the girl by doing precisely nothing at all. Marcel and I discussed devising some kind of hocus-pocus, just to ease the tension with a show.

“No, no. That’s bad. Who knows how these people think? Their own magic. Psychology. They hypnotize themselves with ritual into dying or getting well. The witch doctor has his ritual. If something goes wrong—no hocus-pocus. Doing nothing—that’s our best ritual.”

The sun came up after the long tense night, and the girl was no worse, only hungrier. Then, finally, I took the pills out of my kit, a combination vermifuge and purge. I gave them to her and let her wash them down with coffee.

Marcel and I were dead-tired. I indicated to the chief that we were returning to our house. He grunted and nodded his head, and kept on watching his daughter. The Indians made

way for us outside the hut, staring at us, saying nothing. We crossed the plaza, fell into our hammocks, and slept.

Not for long, however. In an hour or so we were awakened by a great commotion outside. There stood the chief, trembling, and obviously laboring under a great emotion. Half the village stood with him, excited.

"It's happened," said Pablo, blanching.

Marcel and I looked at each other. "Looks like it," he said.

The chief stepped to the door, staring at me, and completely ignoring Pablo, Marcel, and Antonio. "Come," he beckoned.

I joined him and the crowd, and was led to the side of Maharon's ahn-wirra. There he stopped and pointed to a small and nasty pile of offal, full of worms.

"She's well," he said simply.

The next day she was up and about, and apparently quite normal.

## *Chapter XXII*

LIFE became at once pleasanter and more difficult after the episode of the chief's daughter. I had attained status as a doctor, and the Chavantes came to me for every ill.

Marcel cautioned me. "Treat only the simple cases. Give them Epsom salts and quinine and aspirin. Let the witch-doctor worry about the ones that are going to die."

They loved the aspirin and came back for it again and again, often feigning illness to get it.

But with the rise in our status, too, came greater freedom. Maharon himself came to invite us on a hunting-trip, a few days after his daughter's recovery.

We took our arms, the Indians looking on curiously, and wondering what they were for. The other three had rifles. I took the shotgun. We had a machine with it, with which to reload old shells. We had loose powder for them, new percussion caps, assorted shot of various sizes from the smallest bird-shot to the largest ball.

There was a large savannah near the village, teeming with deer that were almost as tame as domestic cattle. Why they took us there, I didn't know. While it was easier to find deer than any other game, the Indians seldom hunted the animals. There were several reasons for this. In the first place too many deer were merely wounded, and bounded off with the arrows sticking in them; it took a lot of work to make arrows and the Chavantes disliked losing them. In the second place there

were taboos on the eating of venison. Women who were pregnant were not allowed to touch the meat, nor were their husbands at the time.

However, I welcomed the visit to the savannah, for here was our chance to show the Indians what firearms could do. All this time they had neither seen nor heard a gun fired, and I thought it best to demonstrate to them that we had a deadly kind of magic in our rifles.

My shotgun was loaded with a solid ball. The deer were grazing peacefully and there would obviously be no trouble about walking to within range. I asked my three white companions to let me give the first demonstration. The Indians were deploying in the grass to stalk the animals, but I stood and raised my hand to stop them. Maharon, curious to see what I would do, motioned to them to obey.

We walked toward the deer in a body. We came within range of a beautiful buck, and I motioned to the men behind me to stop. Carefully I took aim, the buck just standing there looking at me. Then, after a tense moment, I let fly.

The gun roared; there was a wild yell behind me, and all the Chavantes but the chief ran for cover in the tall grass. Maharon stood his ground, looking perplexed and a bit indignant, but standing there nevertheless. Off on the pampa, the herd of deer had jumped at the report of the gun, run a few paces, and now stood there looking at us. The animals hadn't run nearly as far as had the Indians.

I motioned to the chief to follow me. The buck had been killed instantly with a beautiful shot just behind the heart. Maharon stared at him and stooped to examine the bullet hole in detail, a puzzled look on his face. One by one the other Indians came out of the tall grass to crowd around with us, chattering excitedly as they saw the dead animal.



I got up, pointed to some of the other deer, pointed the gun at them, and then handed it to Maharon. He took it gingerly, but was pleased nevertheless. I showed him how to hold it and how to pull the trigger. He took his stance, aimed—after a fashion—and then shot. The gun let go with a terrific noise, and the recoil almost knocked the surprised chief off his feet. He had hit nothing with the shot, but nevertheless he looked as pleased as a small boy. The rest of the Indians were less frightened this time, and stood around jabbering excitedly.

We shot several more deer, and then the whole lot of us went back to the village, making a triumphal entry with meat enough for everybody. The chief seemed especially pleased and could hardly keep his eyes or fingers off the gun. He was bound to try it again, and he went into his house, to emerge a moment later with his tame parrot. He put the poor bird on a stump and motioned to me for the gun. Somewhat dubiously I loaded it with birdshot and handed it to him. Maharon held the muzzle within six inches of the squawking parrot, pulled the trigger, and blew the poor bird all to hell. Nothing was left but a few feathers, but the chief was thoroughly pleased with himself.

While these demonstrations enhanced our prestige, they also led us into a very embarrassing, if dramatic, episode. No sooner had the Chavantes discovered the deadly power of firearms, than they began to display an unholy interest in our guns, to examine them carefully, and to make certain bizarre plans for their use.

I was lying in my hammock one afternoon. Ten or twelve young bucks were squatting on the verandah, chatting, and occasionally saying something to Marcel. I paid no attention, but after a while Marcel came to talk to me.

"They're fixing up something nice for you," he said.

"Now what are they up to?"

"They're fixing it for you to shoot Mahnweel. They're going to get the chief's permission. They say the boy's no good anyway, and it will be a lot of fun to see you shoot him right out here on the plaza, with the whole village looking on."

"What?" I jumped out of my hammock in consternation. It sounded like a typical Chavante idea. Mahnweel was the unfortunate fifteen-year-old orphan boy who bore the brunt of all the village's sadism, the butt of all the Indians' cruel jokes. Having him executed in public, just for the spectacle, was exactly the kind of thing that the Chavantes *would* think up with great relish.

Marcel grinned—rather sourly. "Sure. You gave them a show with the fireworks; you gave them a show shooting deer, and now comes the last act and the great climax. Now you're going to give them the best show of all."

I knew that the Indians meant it. Dozens of times they had asked me what the guns would do to human beings. Now they were going to find out.

Even while Marcel and I were talking, Maharon came to the house, accompanied by one of the younger Indians. He came to the point at once. He picked up one of the rifles and ordered me to shoot Mahnweel. The other Indians crowded around and nodded eagerly.

By this time I had formed a plan. "Of course," I said pleasantly. Marcel stared at me in horrified surprise. I turned to him. "Keep quiet. Everything'll be all right." Then I turned to the chief again.

"Of course I will kill him. With pleasure if you say so. But

not with that." I picked up the shotgun. "This makes a bigger hole. It makes more noise too."

He nodded. "I'll use that thing. And I'll kill the boy tomorrow morning. Tell the people of the village. Mahnweel will stand over there, and I will stand there. Then I'll shoot him and everybody can watch."

There was some argument. Maharon and the others wanted the job done right away, while they were still interested. I tried to indicate to him that killing a man with a gun was no easy task, that it took a bit of preparation, and that the ceremony would be more dramatic if postponed overnight.

The Indians dispersed and spread the glad tidings through the village. That afternoon a larger crowd than ever stood around our house. Men, women, and children stared at us and at the guns in fascination, sometimes edging up to touch the weapons gingerly. One young buck who had seen the deer-slaying, and had watched me instruct Maharon, was kind of a special hero. He picked up a gun and explained its working to the assembled population. That was the end that you pointed at your quarry; this part went against your shoulder—like this; that was the thing that you pulled with your finger; and then—boom!

The others crowded around in fascination.

There was a commotion out on the plaza, and two men came up, dragging the whining Mahnweel. The crowd made way for him, and I thought they were eyeing the unfortunate boy with a new respect. The Indians dragged him up to us, showed him the shotgun, and explained to him amid gusts of bawdy laughter, that he was to be executed in the morning. They spared no details. They told him that I was to do the job, showed him how I'd do it, showed him where he was

going to stand, where I would stand, and made loud noises to indicate how the gun would go off.

For one moment the poor boy stared in bewilderment, the villagers crowding around to watch him. Some of the women and younger girls seemed to show some pity on their faces—the rest, as far as I could see, showed only a fascinated kind of curiosity. Then a curious thing happened. Mahnweel drew himself up to his full height, looked me straight in the eye, and nodded his assent.

From that moment on, he was no longer the browbeaten butt of all the jokes, cringing at the villagers' abuses. Suddenly he took on a new dignity, for suddenly, for the first time in his life, he *was* somebody in the village. The others turned their attention from us and the guns to Mahnweel. He walked through the crowd with a new erect bearing, and they watched his every move with a new respect. He was the center of the stage, and nobody jibed at him any more. Little boys began to follow him around, and their parents watched his every step with an intense curiosity.

"You aren't *really* going to shoot him?" Antonio asked me anxiously in the house.

"Certainly I am. Can't get out of it now, can I?"

Pablo began to object—horror-stricken. "These beasts. You're getting to be just like them."

Marcel grinned. He had guessed what I was going to do. When we were alone that evening, I took two empty shell-cases and loaded them with double charges of powder but no shot. "Big noise, big flash. Mahnweel will be the hero of the occasion." The others grinned.

That night the village was gay and festive. There was high-pitched laughter around all the fires, and excited talking about the morrow's great event. Mahnweel stood about

quietly, listening to the excited discussions of his impending death, smiling slightly at the occasional jibes and jokes that were thrown at him.

I slept easily that night, sure of my plan. The entire village was up and about before sunrise the next morning. People came to our house in droves, crowded around my hammock, stared at me, and said, "Ahn-keet—asleep?"

I tried to ignore them, kept my eyes closed, and feigned sleep. Group after group came, asking the same question "ahn-keet? ahn-keet?"

At last, from sheer weariness, I opened my eyes and said: "Am-pung—awake."

I got up to go to the river for my morning swim, the entire crowd trooping after me. When I jumped in, all the Indians jumped in too. They were fond of the water, and good swimmers. Like nearly all the jungle-Indians, too, they were scrupulously clean, bathing at least twice every day.

Dawn was just breaking, and the jungle-birds were setting up their chorus, when we finished our breakfast. The entire village was lined up on the plaza, waiting for the show to begin. The chief came for me before I had finished my coffee. He stood about impatiently while I picked up the gun and leisurely put the two blank shells in my pocket.

We started for the plaza. A restless jabbering rose from the crowd as we approached. Our entrance was like the dramatic one of a toreador.

We passed the unfortunate Mahnweel, in the custody of two young Indians. The elation of yesterday's attentions had worn off, and he seemed disorganized, dejected, terror-stricken. He stared at me with wide, fear-stricken eyes, and looked ready to weep. I wanted to whisper a word of encouragement to him, but could not risk it.

The chief and I walked over to a position some fifty feet from the ceremonial theater in which we had been imprisoned that first night. Marcel followed me with the sextant, which was a great mystery to the Chavantes. Antonio and Pablo walked in single file in back of him, heads bowed, so as to add as much dignity and ceremony to the occasion as possible.

I reached for the sextant and scanned the sun with it, the assembled Indians looking on in silence. Then I turned and faced the open square. Mahnweel was hustled over to the big building, and turned, facing me. Tense silence gripped the throng, and there was no sound except the rustle of close-packed bodies and the squalling of a baby somewhere.

The guards stepped away from Mahnweel. He looked around him in bewilderment. My companions had ranged themselves in back of me. I looked at the chief. He nodded, and I raised my gun. Ostentatiously I snapped it open, inserted the two blank cartridges, put the gun to my shoulder, and took careful aim. It was a good show. Not a sound came from the audience, and the Indians stared until their eyes seemed to stick out.

A sudden dreadful thought assailed me as I stood there, aiming. Had I picked up the wrong shells? I was almost certain that I had, that the gun was loaded with solid ball. Beads of sweat stood out on my head and my hands trembled. But there was nothing to be done about it now. I pulled the trigger.

The roar of the gun was deafening. A great sigh went up from the crowd at the blast. But Mahnweel did not fall. He jumped at the report, and then stood there, peering at me uncertainly.

I lowered the gun. A drawn-out *o-o-oh* of disappointment

went up from the audience. I motioned to them to be quiet, took the sextant from Marcel, took another look at the sun, gave it back and raised my gun to aim again.

Again there was a tense silence. Again the report crashed out. Again the victim stood there, bewildered, blinking, but unharmed.

I assumed as puzzled an expression as possible. I took the sextant once more, for another look at the sun. Then I turned to Maharon and said solemnly: "The God does not wish him to die. Two shots have I fired, but the bullets went through him without leaving a mark. The spirits have saved him. You have seen me kill deer with this gun; you have blown your parrot all to bits with it, but it does Mahnweel no harm. The spirits protect him."

The old chief looked skeptical. I believe that he suspected a trick, and I was afraid of the anger that might mount in him if he became convinced of it. But suddenly a roar of assent went up from the crowd, which had listened intently to every word I had said. Something had hit that crowd. It was more than satisfied—it had seen a miracle. It had come out to witness the slaughter of an innocent boy, and it had seen a miracle instead. Hundreds of people were babbling excitedly and were moving toward Mahnweel, a brand new respect in their eyes and their voices.

Excellent politician that he was, Maharon took his cue from his people. A slow smile spread over his face. The show had been good; he was satisfied.

From that moment on, Mahnweel's status as a public hero was assured. His position in the village was reversed, and all the agony that the incident may have cost him was proven worthwhile. Men stared at him in admiration as he walked away from the plaza, and girls looked at him coyly. The

very next day he had a mistress and a hammock. With a girl to care for him and the whole village to help him, even his sore leg began to heal. He acquired a garden-plot and was taken on hunting-trips. Overnight he had become a man of affairs and a respected member of the community.

Later, as the Chavantes learned more about firearms, they were of course to discover the trick. But by then it didn't matter. They never held on very long to any one idea.



## Chapter XXIII

LIFE in the village returned to its normal, placid flow—and we loved it. Week after week—hunting, fishing, singing around the fire, telling bawdy stories, working in the gardens, gossiping about our neighbors' foibles—we had a high standing in the community that we lacked in civilization, and there was an unwonted sense of peace, freedom, and security about the life.

We were free to do whatever we liked, as long as we didn't try to escape. Often, for weeks at a time, we never even mentioned the word *escape*, never thought of it. There was time enough when the time came. Often we told ourselves that these savages really knew how to live —

Our evening fire had become a communal institution, and Maharon himself had developed the habit of attending it. Little by little he loosened up and began to tell us things about the village's life and problems.

"Maharon, do your people have enemies? Other Indians? Men? Do you have wars?" So peaceful was the village life—that the idea of tribal wars seemed remote and almost unthinkable.

Maharon grunted. It took him time to answer, as though he were reluctant, and yet wanted to tell us about something.

"Yes," at last. "Others—many people." He ran his hand through his hair to indicate countless numbers. "They are very bad. Four days' journey from here. Fierce warriors and bad enemies."





Chicha is the favorite native beverage of Peru. This vendor keeps his supply in three earthenware bottles and one tin cup serves for all customers.

The blow-gun is one of the savage's most useful weapons. From the hunter's neck hangs a small quiver containing slender darts tipped with poison. These darts are aimed with deadly accuracy at birds, animals, and sometimes men.



"Why, Maharon? Why are they enemies?" I was on dangerous ground, I knew, but I was interested. His face clouded:

"Once they were friends and we exchanged women. That woman, and she, and she," he pointed to various women squatting in the circle, "they came from there. We traded women. We sent them ours and they sent us theirs. That is best. But they cheated us. They sent us some of their sick. Bad men. Bad enemies. We killed some of them and there was war. They still want our women. Sometimes they come and try to steal them ——"

It was obvious from his manner that Maharon had a great respect for his enemies, a respect that approached fear. I pressed him for details but he withdrew into his shell. They talked the Chavante language—that was all he would tell me. Where were they? He glowered angrily at me, as though he suspected that I would try to escape to the other tribe. I asked other questions, but he merely sat by the fire, wrapping his silence around him like a blanket.

We went on to other things, and suddenly Maharon spoke up again—apparently apropos of nothing.

"They have two white men."

"Who has?"

"The others. The other village; our enemies. Two white men have lived with them for many years. One is old. He has long white hair and a white beard."

I sat up, electrified. Two white men? Who were they? Where did they come from? Perhaps they were Colonel Fawcett and his son Jack, who had disappeared somewhere in this country in 1925.

"Tell me about the white men. Have you seen them? What are they like?"

No, Maharon hadn't seen them. Nobody in his village had

seen them. But they were well-known throughout the countryside. Everybody knew about those two. He wouldn't tell me more, and seemed to resent my questions.

We discussed the matter that night, after we were alone.

"Why do you think he told us those things?" I wondered.

"He's up to something," said Antonio. He was right, but we did not discover for several weeks what that something was.

"I can understand it better now," said Marcel, "why he's keeping us. He has enemies; we have guns. We can help him against his enemies."

"Maybe so. There's that, and there is the matter of social prestige. His enemies have only two white men; he has four. It's a thing that goes on in the big cities too. In New York—one social set captures a duke and another a count or a crown-prince or somebody. That's a kind of war, too."

Pablo spoke up: "I'm damned if I want to go on the warpath with them."

That thought had suddenly become uppermost in the minds of all of us. But we decided that there was little chance of our being taken on the warpath. We weren't quite trusted yet, and the chances of escaping to the other side were too good—the chances of our joining those two other white men in the enemy-camp.

However, we went hunting and fishing with them whenever we wanted.

Fishing was the simplest thing in the world. They cut limbs from a bush called *ushchachera*, beat it to bruise the bark, and then whipped the water with it above holes that seemed likely to harbor fish. Soon the fish would rise to the water, bellies up, and float downstream. They were anesthetized, and soon regained consciousness. But too late. By

the time they revived, they'd been tossed out on the bank. Often we returned from such fishing-trips with as many fish as twenty-five men could carry.

The method of fishing was not unusual, but it was the first time I had seen it practiced. For countless centuries Indians throughout the Amazon Basin have been catching their fish in that manner, using various plants that we group under the name of *barbasco*. In Peru the practice was once taken up by white men, and then forbidden by the government as a wise conservation-move. In recent years, however, the *barbasco* family of plants, to which *ushchachera* probably belongs, has been discovered by civilization—with the result that there is now an active trade in it. *Barbasco* is now cultivated by whites in the Amazon Basin, as well as gathered wild. Hundreds of tons of it are shipped every year to New York. Its virtues are that its juices are poisonous to fish and especially to insects, while entirely harmless to human beings. Many scientists regard it as the most effective insecticide known, and already it is making itself felt up here as a spray for vegetables and fruits, to displace the old sprays that were likely to poison the human consumers as well as the insects. So again, as they did with cocaine, quinine, rubber, sarsaparilla, and numberless other things, the Indians of Amazonas have given us white men something of inestimable value.

Near the village was a section of the Rio das Mortes, cut off by rapids from the downstream sections. It furnished us fish, and numerous river-turtles, which were cleaned and roasted in their own shells. Some were so large that it took two men to lift them.

We went after fierce wild boars—with clubs. They were chased by the fleet Chavantes till they took shelter in the holes of the *capivaras*—beasts like rabbits but five or six times as

large. Then the wild pigs were smoked out of the holes, and clubbed as they emerged. They weighed anywhere from thirty to a hundred pounds, and it was not at all unusual to return from a hunt with fifteen or twenty of them.

After every successful hunting or fishing-trip, there was always a village feast, or rather a gorge. For several hours the Chavantes stuffed as much food into themselves as they could hold, then went to sleep, and then got up and ate more. That kept up for several days until all the meat was gone.

There were occasional adventures with jaguars, which the Chavantes regarded with much less awe than did we. Marcel and I went with the Indians on a three-day hunt. On the first day we bagged a female with kittens. The male came, enraged. He attacked one of the Indians, a fine young fellow named Sahn, and a special friend of ours, and tore a deep gash in his shoulder. Marcel saved the man's life with a well-placed shot.

But those things were part of the life, and taken in their stride. The one serious problem involved in that one occasion was what to do with the wounded Indian. The others refused to do anything about him. They had come to hunt, and hunt they would, and Sahn would have to make the best of it. Marcel and I left the hunt to take the man back to the village, and treat his wounds, and so cement his friendship for us tighter than ever.

When we returned, we found that Antonio had had a nasty experience of his own. He had knocked down the chief's son, and trouble seemed to be brewing. Seeing that Antonio had nothing to do with any of the women, the chief's son had made advances of his own to him. It was a perfectly natural thing in the Indians' code, but not in Antonio's. He had lost his temper and given the fellow a punch in the nose.

The chief was furious, and all four of us were more than a little scared. Would they kill us? One of the bad things about life with the Chavantes was its uncertainty. Human life was cheap, and there was no predicting what would send a man off in a towering rage.

I hunted up the chief for a palaver. He was guarded, stony, unapproachable. All his kindness had left him. But I had learned the Indian trick myself, of working myself up to a towering rage. There was a stormy session, and eventually the chief gave in.

*Tik-an-toe. Tik-an-toe.* Good friend. He was our good friend. His son was our good friend. We were all good friends. *Tik-an-toe.*

The matter turned out to be another one of those unpleasant incidents that ruffle the tranquillity of existence everywhere. Nevertheless it aroused in me again that peculiar feeling of bafflement that had beset me so often during my life with the Chavantes. Apparently dangerous crises had come again and again since that very first evening of our captivity; each time we had done something, and the crisis had passed, and lapsed over into loud protestations of *Tik-an-toe*. Were these savages really so easily moved from one extreme to the other? Or were they just playing games with us—trying us out to see how we would react? I didn't know, and I don't know yet. There were depths to the Chavante character that could not be fathomed.

We were sitting around our fire. Marcel and Antonio had just sung a song. Some of the Indians had reciprocated with the Chavante version of "Cuddle Up a Little Closer—" There was laughter everywhere, and old Maharon himself seemed in an expansive mood. I was vaguely disturbed, however. I couldn't get the thought of those white men out of my



head—the two in the enemy village. Fawcett? Gold-hunters? Some adventurers? Missionaries? Who knew? But white men, and the more I thought about them the more excited I became—if only because of a growing desire to see new members of my own race again.

“Maharon—those white men who stay with your enemies ——”

He looked at me, suspiciously.

“How long have they been there?”

Maharon didn't know for sure. Ten years perhaps—he indicated it uncertainly on the fingers of his two hands.

Ten years! About ten years. Perhaps one or two more or less. That might well be Fawcett and his son. If I could only contrive to reach him in some way.

“Maharon, you say those Indians are fierce and dangerous?”

He grunted.

“Perhaps I can do something. Let me go to see them. Let me talk to the white men. All four of us. We have our guns and we are not afraid. Perhaps we can make peace for you.”

Immediately my three companions fell in with my request. They, too, had begun to develop vague longings to escape, with news of white prisoners in the next village. Perhaps this would offer a chance.

But I could see from the chief's face that I had made a mistake. His eyes clouded; he glowered at me, anger visibly mounting within him.

“No, no, no!” he almost shouted it. “Not under any circumstances. You are not to go near that village. We watch you day and night. I say No! I have had trouble enough with those people ——”

He was working himself up into a high pitch of angry

excitement. Suddenly, however, he stopped in the middle of a sentence, stood up stiffly, and stalked to his house. The evening was ruined. One or two Indians glared at us, the rest looked embarrassed and got up to go, one by one.

The four of us were in dismay. So that was that—and again we had displeased the old boy. All day we wondered what would happen and if there would be an aftermath. It had after all been the first time that we had openly suggested going away, and the vehemence with which the suggestion had been received was not encouraging.

The upshot, however, was a staggering surprise. The one thing that now seemed absolutely impossible; the one thing that we would never once have suspected.

Maharon came over the next evening, more cordial than ever. *Tik-an-toe, Tik-an-toe*. We were the best friends he had ever had. We were fine fellows, good companions, good hunters; we were a tribute to his tribe.

“What do you think he’s driving at?” Antonio asked.

“I don’t know. He’s got something on his mind. He’s up to something.”

We were a tribute to his village, great hunters, valiant men.

I kept as blank a face as possible, acknowledging the compliments with a grave courtesy that I had learned from old Maharon himself. If he was bargaining for something I wasn’t going to show any enthusiasm until I knew what the proposition was.

And then it came. The chief liked us so much, he felt so close to us, he had so high a respect for us, that he, who had the responsibility for all these people, he—Maharon, the chief—*was going to initiate me into the tribe as a sub-chief*.

For a moment I looked at him in stunned surprise, as did my companions and all the others about the fire. Then a babel

of voices arose. Indians were grinning and talking excitedly, obviously they were pleased with their chief's decision. They expressed their pleasure to me, and to each other, and to Maharon. There was no chance for me to say anything except to thank the chief for the signal honor.

"Are you going to do it?" Pablo asked me anxiously that night.

"Do it? Of course I'll do it."

"I don't like it"—fearfully.

Marcel laughed. "You jealous? Want to be chief yourself?"

"You shut up." Pablo turned on him with some heat. He was the touchiest and the most nervous of all of us. Then he addressed himself to me:

"They make you chief. It'll be all the harder for us to escape from here. They'll watch you all the closer."

"I don't see it that way, Pablo. If I'm chief, I ought to be more free. It ought to be easier to get away."

"No, no. Harder. When did the old boy do this? After last night. After we'd talked to him about seeing those two other white men over there. He didn't like that. He makes you a sub-chief. Why? So he can have a better hold on you. Or maybe so you'll lead us on the warpath against those other Indians. A sub-chief. He *has* to go to war. And we'll have to go with you."

His fears were beginning to make me angry. "Listen, Pablo. That may all be, but it's neither here nor there. I don't mind being initiated, but can you tell me what I could do if I did mind? Not a damned thing. Not a solitary damned thing. Old Maharon has decided to make me a chief, and the whole village is all for it, and that's all there is to it. You

figure out where we'd be if I said no. Don't be a fool. We have to play along with him until we see our chance."

"Play along," bitterly. "That's all we do. And you don't know what he's got on his mind. He's figuring on something for us that he isn't talking about, and all we can do is play along. I don't like ——"

There was something to what he said, and after the first surprised elation had worn off I began to be worried. The thoughts raced through my mind all night. What did it mean to be a sub-chief of the Chavantes? Here in the village it didn't mean so much. It meant only that you had the responsibility for the care, feeding, cleanliness, and general well-being of the eight or ten families in your house. In my case it meant that I was officially responsible for myself and my three companions unless Maharon decided to move me into a larger house with a number of Chavante families. What did it mean—being a sub-chief? Did it mean obeying blindly every order that Maharon might issue? What would it mean if I didn't choose to obey?

And beyond the village? Suddenly I remembered all the wild tales I had heard outside, of Chavante ferocity. Raiding and burning and pillaging—murder, arson, rape, marriage by capture. I hadn't seen anything of that kind, but that needn't mean that it didn't take place. These people were capable of anything. Maharon had had something on his mind lately. Was he fitting me into some diabolical scheme? Would I some day find myself forced to lead my companions on a raiding-expedition?

Restlessly I tossed in my hammock, my thoughts growing more and more bitter and confused. I had heard, and disbelieved, many tales of renegade white men who led savage Indians in attacks on white settlements. There are many such

tales in our own country, dating back to the days when we still had a frontier. There are many such tales in the Amazonas today, for the simple reason that Amazonas is still a turbulent frontier, is still where the United States was a hundred years ago.

The more feverishly I thought about it—in that unhappy night, the less I liked it. In the United States, presidential candidates and business nabobs were continually initiated into Indian tribes—they looked smug and a bit foolish when they got their pictures into the papers, wearing savage war-bonnets. But this, I was sure, was no publicity stunt, no mere matter of social prestige. If I became a chief, I'd be one for keeps and all the way through, and there could be no half-way measures about it. Still there was no way of getting out of it.

I felt better in the morning, as I became interested in the impending rites. The whole village was in a fever of excited preparation. Great piles of fish, wild boar, yams, and sweet potatoes were being roasted. Men were in the ceremonial hall, painting themselves, getting ready for something really stupendous.

And then something happened that took the wind right out of my sails.

Maharon came and informed me that he had selected my wife—one of his daughters!

A wife! I didn't want a wife!

Maharon was unmoved. Every chief had to have a wife. A chief without a wife was nobody. Not for a moment, he implicated by his behavior, would he tolerate such goings-on in *his* village.

But damn it all, I didn't *want* a wife.

The old chief didn't even get angry this time. There was a note of complete and unescapable finality in his voice. His

own daughter. I would be married to her at the same time that I was initiated.

"Go on," Marcel said later, laughing. "What are you hesitating about? She's the nicest girl in the village. We poor fellows have to leave the women alone. But you— Go ahead. I'll take her if you don't want her."

I wasn't quite sure that Marcel *had* left the women alone. But there was something to what he said. I'd noticed the girl often; about eighteen, small, olive-complexioned rather than dark, with wavy, silken hair and fine white teeth, and with regular, almost classic features. Her hands and feet were small, she carried herself well, her figure was excellent, she was clean and dainty, her manner was demure —

"Go on, what are you waiting for?"

There wasn't any waiting to be done. I'd been drawn into it and there was no way of getting out.

Some men came to take me to the ceremonial hut. I was completely in their charge and didn't have a word to say. They stripped off my clothes and painted me grotesquely from head to foot. My whole body was covered with a grease made scarlet with the juice of the *urukii* berry. Grotesque figures were painted on my face, chest, and back. Bracelets were painted around my ankles and wrists with a blue-black concoction made from genipapo fruit. Even a breech-clout was denied me. A Chavante chief, I was given to understand, did not bother with such useless things.

"Painted like a billboard," snickered Marcel when I finally emerged, feeling foolish and miserable, exposed to the sun, bitten and stung by countless gnats, *piums*, flies, and mosquitoes.

But as the ceremony got under way, I forgot my own discomfort. The drums began to roll, the men began to dance,

and something in the splendid savagery of that celebration got under my skin.

Four young males, in headdresses and bracelets made of the most brilliant feathers of jungle birds, began to dance to the rhythmic thudding of the drums. It wasn't so much the quality of their dance that set the nerves on edge; it was its endlessness. Hour after hour they hopped and turned—thump, thump, thump thump—hour after hour, accompanied by the same endless, monotonous rhythm, hopping, turning, gyrating, shaking their arms, letting out whoops, easing the pace and building it up again, speeding up to a furious climax, slowing down, building up again to the same climax, hour after hour, until we, in the audience, were ready to cry out from sheer nervous exhaustion, "Stop, stop, enough, enough!"

Two minutes of that dance, five minutes, fifteen minutes of it, would have seemed crude and childlike to any sophisticated person. One hour, two hours, four hours, could get under the most sophisticated hide with a superb artistry, guaranteed to tear to pieces the soul of any man not accustomed to that kind of thing.

*Thump, thumpity thump.* The spectacle's sheer, savage monotony was enough to make any one want to stand up and yell. I glanced at Pablo. He was sick—physically ill, green in the face. He wanted to go and vomit and yet he didn't dare. Or he couldn't. He was more fascinated than anybody else. I could see it working in him. I could see him, at times, itch to get up and get into things, to tear his own clothes off, to join those men out there. And then I could see him suddenly realizing what it was that he wanted to do, and turning sick with revulsion against himself at the mere idea. But they gave him no rest, no peace. *Thump, thump, thump*—on and on as though he didn't exist, as though nobody else existed either,

as though they were doing it only as a test of themselves, to see how long they could last.

If it was an ordeal for the dancers, it was a greater ordeal for the spectators. There were times when I felt it working into me too. But I was in a favored position. I felt suddenly identified with this thing. I was a chief; I had a professional interest in the show, as an actor might who steps on the stage and moves a vast audience to tears with his artistry. Marcel and Pablo and Antonio were in a different position. I had a job of my own to do at that ceremony, and it sustained me. I felt sorry for the others, responsible for them at times, ashamed of them at other times, and gradually I began to feel myself completely dissociated from them.

Don't ask me how that happened. That savage demonstration there in the plaza was *right*. It was dead right; the way it ought to have been. There wasn't a single discordant note in it. It was designed to stir a man's emotions, to make him feel identified with the thing that was going on, to make him take his chieftainship seriously—not to rationalize it or talk about it, but to *take* it, *accept* it, as part of his life, part of his being—all the way through. It succeeded for the time being, and that is why it was a great artistic success.

Five minutes of it, ten minutes, half an hour, would have been an ethnological curiosity, which any scientist would have been delighted to see, to record, to study, describe, dissect, tear to pieces, analyze, and compare with the folkways of other people. But these hours of it, *thump, thump thump*, this barbaric repetition getting under your skin, was a sirens' song that would make any ethnologist forget his notes, his science, his Ph.D., his museum—would have hypnotized him, exactly the way it did Pablo and Marcel and Antonio, into



sitting there with sweat pouring down his face, straining to let out a yell and get into the thick of things.

Finally one of the dancers dropped out and fell to the ground, almost unconscious from sheer exhaustion; then another, then another, until only the leader was left dancing on, defiant of muscles and nerves and fatigue—dancing on, apparently into eternity.

Then came great wooden trays of food, and gourds of fermented honey—a powerful beverage—and exhaustion, at first, among the spectators, and then much stuffing and cramming, and a little laughter here and there, and some jokes, and more food in a veritable orgy. With the release of the tension came a bit of singing here and there. Then, suddenly, all the villagers cut loose in a happy babel. Talking and laughing and singing all at once, almost hysterically.

*Singing.* It rose above the general din from the throats of four of my particular friends, as nearly as they could repeat the words, the meaning of which they didn't suspect: "Cuddle up a Little Closer, Baby Mine."

And it was that song, suddenly, that was barbaric. That song and all it stood for. "Cuddle up a Little Closer, Baby Mine." I had brought it from a fantastic, far-off world. It was discordant, savage. It didn't belong. It jarred me for a moment. With a start I realized how Pablo felt. Where were all the doubts and fears, and shame, that I had felt only four hours before? I was to be a chief, I was to be married. Where was all this talk that I had had with myself about the degradation of being a squaw-man?

"Cuddle up a Little—" Sharply I gave the order. Stop it! Stop that song! The men stopped and looked at me with surprise. I was surprised myself. I was a chief already. I was giving orders. Maharon looked at me with a pleased expres-

sion on his face. The celebration went on. Antonio tried to talk to me. I paid no attention. I wasn't fooling, not putting on an act. I was a Chavante, a chief, with other things to tend to. It was all that real.

The ceremony went on for several days, and every day the dancing was repeated, and every day it got into me the same way. Several days of dancing and eating, of gorging and drinking fermented honey, of capturing a man's whole emotional make-up, and then letting it flow out again into the directed channels of fellowship with these Indians.

They crowned me with a coronet made of feathers from the red and green macaw, and from the orange flamingo. Now I was a chief in fact, and now came my wedding.

Sahn, the Indian whom Marcel and I had brought back, wounded, from the hunt, demonstrated his artistic ability with a new coat of paint and new designs. I was to go out that way, naked, penetrate the jungle, and return with game for my bride. She was to enter the house with me, hang her hammock, and prepare the game for our dinner.

I exercised my chiefly prerogative and insisted on wearing boots for the ordeal. Sahn was horrified, but I didn't stop to argue. Streaked with paint, naked except for field-boots, I plunged into the jungle with my Mannlicher rifle in one hand and a large machete in the other.

I came to a fresh *Paca* hole not far from the village. The *paca* is a large short-eared rabbit weighing about twenty pounds. It is the finest game in the Matto Grosso. I dug with my machete, the animal emerged; I shot it and started back to the village.

Bwana, my bride, was waiting for me outside of our house. She looked splendid, in a feathered head-dress, anklets and

bracelets of feathers, and a short skirt made of macaw's tail-feathers. Her eyes were bright, eager with life, and full of understanding. There was a faint flush on her cheeks. She lowered her eyes as I came, and silently followed me into the house.



A headhunter with his freshly prepared trophy. Before a tribal Festival of the Shrunkn Heads this man must live apart from his womenfolk, remove the plumes from his hair, and live on a vegetarian diet of yucca.



## Chapter XXIV

THE days that began with my wedding were amazingly happy and jolly. Bwana fitted herself with ease, grace, and much laughter, into the difficult role of being the wife of one white man, and housekeeper for four. She was no less efficient for managing things with a light touch and with a sparkle in her eye, and she was a great favorite of my three companions. I dreaded the possibility of Maharon promoting me into a larger household, where I would have to live with, and supervise, eight or ten Chavante families, but he seemed to make no move in that direction. Perhaps Bwana had something to do with that. She was queen of the roost in a small establishment where she was appreciated, where she had far more freedom and fun than she would have had in one of the larger houses, with half a dozen other women looking on, criticizing, getting jealous, and perhaps making trouble.

She was appreciated, that is, in everything but her cooking, which was undoubtedly excellent according to Chavante standards but gave us many a painful moment. One day she served us a platter of well-roasted toads; the next we watched her unconcernedly chewing up some of the food and spitting it into the pot to make a kind of gruel. We didn't want to eat it, and yet we didn't want to hurt her feelings, which is a dangerous and embarrassing position in which many a woman has had many a man even in more civilized countries. At first we feigned indigestion, but then she insisted on

taking care of us in our illness. Again we thought we had to let her, for fear of offending her.

"It's a tyranny," growled Marcel good-naturedly. "It's a tyranny, that's what it is."

I had had a bit of previous experience with married life, and while this was far more pleasant, I nevertheless recognized many of the old symptoms and techniques.

"She's a wonder," I answered. "That's my wife. She might as well have gone to finishing-school."

But I discovered that I had there done her an injustice. Bwana didn't use her hurt feelings as a weapon. They didn't seem to get hurt. When we eased her out of the cooking-job because we couldn't go on forever having indigestion, she accepted the change gracefully and with no show of sensitiveness. We went back to the old routine, in which the four of us took turns as cooks. She ate what we put in front of her, and at least pretended to like it, which is more than we had done with her. Some of our dishes must have seemed as strange to her as hers did to us, but she gave no indication that she hadn't been eating them all her life.

However, her influence made itself felt immediately in the house. She took charge, cleaned up, and kept things clean. Giving me my tips as to my duty as chief, she also put us to work. There must be a garden for every household, maintained by that household to supply its own needs.

"All right, boys, our idle days are over. We're part of the village now, and the days are over when we expect the Indians to feed us. Bwana says garden, and garden it is."

"It's a tyranny, I'm telling you. It's government-organized hen-pecking." But they went to work willingly enough, especially since Bwana went with us, slashing away at the jungle with a machete, hauling vines and underbrush into

piles, preparing a clearing for the burning that was to get it ready for sowing-time.

We went for long ramblings in the forest, just the five of us—fishing, hunting, swimming, loafing, working. Bwana was always with us, and we wanted it that way. She added a note of gaiety and meaning to existence, which hadn't been there before. A note of freedom, too. The villagers no longer watched us as closely as they once had done. Undoubtedly Bwana's behavior was scandalous according to Chavante standards, and undoubtedly many of the other women gossiped about her in vicious indignation. But if so, she paid no attention, nor did old Maharon, her father. We were drawn more closely together than ever before, we began to develop a life of our own, quite apart from our previous existence as circus-specimens and village-curios, so we began to form an active and happy closed circle, into which gossip, evil, and even restlessness hardly penetrated—for a time.

Even restlessness. Occasionally we stared at each other in surprise. Not for a long time had we talked of escaping! Escaping? To what? From what? Even Pablo, feeling happy and expansive one evening, came out with a statement that surprised all of us—coming from him—though it echoed a thought that every one of us had toyed with at one time or another.

"Run away? Sometimes I think I should, but then I wonder why. Why should we? Of course we should. Of course. We're traitors to our race, staying here, traitors to our religion, traitors to civilization," but he said it without heat, as an interesting fact that he had finally accepted. "Of course we *should* get away. It's our duty. But do we *want* to, that's the question. I don't know. Sometimes I think—" He almost



shuddered at the very notion of his own renegade thoughts. But he forced himself to go on.

"Sometimes I wonder what I'd go back to if I escaped from here. Who was I outside? Nobody. A workingman. I was kicked around by everybody. I worked for what somebody consented to give me, and I licked his boots to get that. I've been everywhere, in Europe, in the United States, in all parts of South America. Everywhere the same. Work or starve, be kicked around, be a waiter, take abuse, work, or damned well starve. This is different. I work here, but it's different."

Antonio nodded a hearty assent. Marcel laughed. "You'll discover some day that there's a price to be paid for freedom, as you call it. It's worth it, but what *is* it? What is freedom? During the years when I was a bandit, I was free. I was as free as the birds, as long as I stayed away from the bird-catchers. I could sleep under the stars and I could go anywhere that the rest of the bandits allowed me to go. But this—you're right, Pablo. This is different."

Marcel thought a minute. Then he began, gently, to rag Pablo again. He could never resist it.

"But think," he said, "what a hero you'll be when you get out. People will honor you. They will respect you. A man who has lived with the Chavantes. A prisoner of the Chavantes who came out to tell the tale. Won't that be different, too?"

I cut in on that one. "It'll be different, all right. If we should escape from here, we'll be famous, and big heroes. But I've been thinking about that. It won't be long before people just think we're crazy. Touched in the head by our hardships. And then we'll be worse off than ever."

"Crazy?"

"Sure. What will we be when we get out? Men who were

captured by the Chavantes. But we won't be captured by them any more, and what will we be good for in our world? Captured by the Chavantes. You don't make a living out of that, and it doesn't prepare you for making a living. All it does is to give you a useless label, and something to dream about—and talk about. I can see us now—for years we four will be able to talk about nothing but how we lived with the Chavantes. And it won't get us anywhere, because people won't believe us. They'll just think we're crazy."

Marcel knew what I was driving at. "No," he said. "They won't believe us. They'll believe that I belong in jail, and you fellows belong in padded cells. You tell people this," indicating the village with a sweep of his arm. "How can you tell them this, in Rio de Janeiro or New York?"

"That's right, Marcel. They won't really believe it. They know very well what these savages are like. They've known it for years. They've known it from the adventure-stories that they've been reading ever since they were children. They've known it from newspaper-accounts of what happened to Colonel Fawcett, and from the fantastic tales told by explorers who just dashed in and then dashed out again without ever knowing what it was that happened to them and what it was they saw. They *know* what savage life is like, and they won't accept anything else. We come out and tell a different story, and that proves that we are liars. We come out and tell them we liked it, and that proves that we are renegades. We're liars, we're traitors to our race.

"And we *are*, too. We ought to be. That's the way it ought to be. We belong to a fine civilization. We come out and claim that another one, that this barbarity, is more peaceful, more friendly, even if it is more cruel, that one can be more happy here. If our people believed us, their whole civilization

would collapse. That's the way it goes. That's the way people protect themselves. They just think we're touched in the head and are glad that they're not like us."

I thought of some conversations I had had with Maharon: "I can tell the old chief about my country, and he thinks there's nothing strange about it. Skyscrapers, automobiles, subways, radio; there's nothing strange about those things, they're just a different way of living that old Maharon wouldn't like to try. And he's seen all that anyway. He's seen it because he has a radio and television all his own that's much less crude than ours. He's seen it all, or he thinks he has, and that amounts to the same thing."

"Yes. High-ya-waska."

"Certainly. High-ya-waska. I don't know what it is, and you don't know what it is. But the Chavantes know what it is, or think they do, and that's all that matters. They'll believe that we have the radio, they'll believe it without a question, because they've got something better. Do *we* have anything that picks a man up while he's asleep for an hour or two, and transports him thousands of miles away, so he can see what's there? No. And that's why it will be difficult for us when we return. That's why we'll never be able to convince people at home that this life is what it is. That's why we're caught."

Pablo shuddered, obviously fighting the devil within him again, obviously struggling to hold on to the dogmas that had shaped his life and were now slipping away fast. "Yes, we're caught. And if we stay, we'll be just like these people. We'll learn their perversions and think nothing of them. We'll learn their cruelties, and be just like the Chavantes. We'll go on raiding-trips with them. There haven't been any yet, but there will be. We'll go out and kill and murder and burn and

rape, and we'll think that's as it ought to be. I tell you I don't want to go on the warpath with them. It's bestiality; it's—oh well, you're right. We're caught and we must take things as they come."

There were a number of such discussions, all leading to the amazing fact that we had almost reconciled ourselves to life with the Indians. Marcel, Antonio, and once in a while even Pablo, began to talk about taking women of their own, and I found myself approving of the idea. I would take the matter up with Maharon.

Then, one day, something happened that knocked all our ideas of a lifelong, peaceful, bucolic, savage existence into a cocked hat. Something that the Chavantes could never understand. Something that demonstrated that our newly acquired veneer of savagery was very thin, after all.

We were out in the woods, near the river. Bwana's brother was with us, the fellow whom Antonio had once knocked down for making improper advances to him. We had gone to cut down palm-trees to get the hearts, our favorite food. Long, white stems, five or six feet long, and some three inches in diameter. They were crisp and delicate, tasting like the finest kind of endives—only better, with more body. We had cut three trees, and stripped the hearts out, while Bwana's brother went roaming off by himself. We were ready to return, but he hadn't come back yet. We waited impatiently for about fifteen minutes, and finally he came strolling out of the bush, holding his right hand out at arm's length.

"See," he exclaimed.

We glanced at his hand indifferently, not interested in what he had there. Then, suddenly, Marcel said: "Wait a minute. What is that?"

We all saw it together, and stared at it, speechless. He had

a magnificent rough diamond, almost as large as a pigeon's egg. Against his dark body it looked like another "*Estrella del Sur*." It was perfect, worth a fortune.

"God, what a beauty," I gasped. I reached for it. And then, to my horror, the fellow snatched it away and flung it far out into the middle of the muddy river.

We stood there, speechless. A wave of anger swept over me, and I wanted to throw the Indian into the water after the diamond. Bwana saw my perturbation.

"It's no good," she said. "We've seen many like that. It's an evil pebble. If you put that kind of a stone next to your body you will be impotent. There is fire in it. They are bad."

We stood there, dejected, suddenly overwhelmed by the realization of what we had plunged into the jungles for in the first place. The thought of treasure had begun to be remote and unreal during our months in the village, but suddenly it was revived, full power, at the sight of one magnificent diamond, held out to us and then snatched away and flung away irretrievably by a brown-skinned savage.

We asked the fellow to show us where he'd found it, Bwana begging us to leave that kind of thing alone. We searched all afternoon, but found no further traces of gems. Dejectedly we walked home.

But there was hope in us nevertheless.

"Where there's one, there must be more. Bwana says they've seen many like that. Perhaps, perhaps those tales about the Rio das Mortes aren't so fantastic after all."

Possessed by a new interest and a new energy, we began to comb the nearby jungle and river banks with picks, shovels, and pans. One day we climbed a small incline near our slashing, and ran into a vein of rock crystal. Lying on top of the

clay beside the vein, was a gold nugget the size of a cherry. It was fastened to a piece of rock crystal.

Pay-dirt at last. All our peaceful daydreams about a life with the Chavantes left us. We saw ourselves already, wealthy beyond the dreams of avarice, back in our own world, driving fine cars.

The fever had us, and the next few days we worked like Trojans, building a puddling-tank and a sluice box. It was a difficult job. We had to make our boards as we went, cutting them out of logs with axe and machete. Word of our new occupation spread through the village, and the Chavantes came to watch us, standing around in puzzled groups, unable to fathom why anybody should go to so much trouble for that worthless yellow metal. We were too absorbed in our task to try to explain our quest to them. Antonio tried it just once. He pointed to a gold tooth to indicate that gold did have some utilitarian value. After that they evidently thought that we were looking for gold teeth. But why we should was still a mystery to them.

They merely came, and stood and watched.

Our sluice was finished, and we began to work it. We had to carry the dirt about a quarter of a mile from the "mine" to the river, and had to lift the water in kettles out of the river into the sluice. There were some results, some little gold. Perhaps more would turn up eventually. We settled down to a steady job.

One afternoon we saw some of the Indians down at the end of the sluice, curiously picking out gold. I saw one Indian select a bit of the metal and hold it up to his mouth. Another looked in earnestly, and then shook his head. Whereupon the first Indian threw the gold into the river as being unlike An-

tonio's tooth, and therefore worthless. We shouted for them to stop, but still they didn't understand what we wanted.

"You and your damned gold tooth," growled Marcel.

We worked steadily for some twenty-five days, keeping an eye on the Indians, sweating over the unaccustomed heavy drudgery, but happy. We were finally getting results. Bwana was unhappy—mourning over the good old carefree days, eternally wanting to know why we couldn't go back to leading a normal life. Maharon was puzzled and suspicious, but did nothing to stop us. We were completely absorbed in our task. We carried dirt and water to the sluice, grunted from the exertion, and picked gold-nuggets out at the tail end.

And then, one day, we had a relapse and took a vacation. Antonio lifted our stock of gold—fondly. "There's ten kilos here at least," he said.

"Ten kilos is a lot of gold."

"It's too damned much," said Pablo, suddenly dispirited.

"What do you mean, too much?"

"What good will it do us, in here?"

"You don't think we're going to stay here, do you?"

And then, suddenly, we all knew it—clearly. We knew it as surely as we knew that night followed day: we were not, after all, going to stay with the Chavantes.

Ten kilos was a lot of gold. After we got out, we found that we had fourteen kilos, about thirty pounds. Each of us received approximately twenty-five hundred dollars as his share—and then wished fervently that we'd stayed in there a year or so longer in order to build up a real stake. If we'd stayed, if we'd only stayed, we could have gathered enough gold to let us retire for life.

But that was hindsight. Our foresight at the time was that we had gold, we had found what we'd come for, we could

always return—a man always thinks that he can always return, that he *will* return—but he seldom does.

Now, suddenly, we had a new interest. There was no more gold-washing because we had something else and more important to think about. When it looked as though we would be able to get away, then all our attention was focussed on that task; when it looked as though we couldn't get away, we washed no gold because there was no sense in it; the stuff was worthless where we were. That is the way a man thinks—and works—and throws away his chances while groping in the mists of uncertainty.

But we were going to get away. Somehow, we knew it. And now all our interests, all our energies, were given to the important task of discovering *how*.



## *Chapter XXV*

WE HAD been with the Chavantes about four and a half months. We took stock of our provisions one day, and their meagerness alarmed us. The coffee was exhausted, and for several weeks we had been using a substitute made of browned, dried corn, which we sweetened with honey. Our clothes were in tatters—after my marriage and initiation-ceremony I had resumed the habit of wearing clothes, which now hung about me in rags. The flashlight-batteries were almost run down; that was bad if only because the Indians still held the flashlight in awe. Our ammunition was almost gone, and with it our chance of being self-sustaining. There was very little salt left; we had used it freely for buying food and other things from the Indians, and they had grown very fond of it.

We held a council of war, and it was not reassuring. Not only were clothes, salt, firearms, and the like necessary for a comfortable existence as we conceived of it, but they gave us a certain measure of superiority over the Indians; they allowed us to keep face, and so to hold our own in the village. Once they were gone, our status would inevitably change. We would have no bargaining-power, no skill for subsistence. We would be more helpless than any twelve-year-old boy in the village, dependent on the Indians for everything. And so, inevitably, our social standing would go down, and we would become despised, abused, kicked around.

There was nothing to do but make a break for freedom soon.

"You go to your father-in-law," suggested Marcel. "You're on good terms with the old boy. Tell him that we have to go away for two months to get more salt and ammunition. He doesn't want to be without those things either. You go talk to him."

I did, and it didn't work.

"We need salt," I told Maharon. "Our supply is nearly gone. Your people like it very much, and white men find it necessary. Will you let us go for two moons, to get more?"

"No!" short, snappy, decisive, without argument.

I bowed my head and left, but I tried him again the next day.

"Our salt is almost gone. Our ammunition is almost gone. Will you let us go and get more?"

"No!"

I returned to our house. I had a suitcase with a lock on it, and in it I hid a small amount of salt for our own use. Then I traded all the rest of it to the Indians for yams, bananas, peanuts, corn, and other things. As usual, they ate it up immediately. Then Maharon's small daughter came to ask for her father's daily allowance of salt.

"Tell your father there isn't any more. It's all gone."

The child left, and in a minute the chief himself came over, fuming.

"Eh? What's this? The salt is gone?" He looked around, but we had been careful, that day, to prepare the food without a grain of salt.

"All gone. I told you we must get more."

He stalked out. I saw him again at his house, later, and asked him the usual question.

"May we go and get more salt?" There was no use, I knew, in our going without the chief's permission. There was no possibility of our getting halfway to the boat, without being caught.

This time, at least, there was not the usual curt and decisive "no."

"We and our forefathers," Maharon told me gravely, "have always lived here without salt. We have always been healthy. It is not necessary. You can learn to live without it."

"We can learn, but it will be less pleasant. All of you have learned to like salt. We can get more for you."

"It is better to do without it."

He was wavering, and I pressed my advantage.

"But the ammunition. There is almost no ammunition for our guns. We cannot use them without ammunition."

He hesitated. "We have always hunted with spears and clubs and bows and arrows. We don't need your guns."

Again I left, but this time feeling vastly encouraged. He was beginning to crack.

I returned to his house every day, always with the same request.

"We can go and get ammunition, and we can get guns for you. Let us go and you shall have a gun of your own. You shall have three—four guns."

I could see that the prospect intrigued him, but still he was adamant.

The next day I offered him six guns, and two large sacks of salt, all for himself. And then, suddenly, he said, "You can go."

He said it as simply as that, without argument or palaver. "You can go"—I stared at him in amazement.

"You," he said, "and twenty of my men. Your companions will stay here. I will send twenty men to watch you."

"No," I said, fumbling for some valid objection to the scheme. He shrugged his shoulders. That day's interview was over.

We held a council of war in our house, and I went back the next day to see Maharon.

"You have enemies. They are bad and they are fierce. If you had salt to trade with them, if you had guns, think of what a chief you would be. You would be the mightiest chief in this country. I can get you salt for yourself and all your people, with enough left over to trade with your enemies to make them behave themselves. I can get guns and ammunition for all your people. Nobody will then dare to attack you. You will be able to raid your enemies' villages whenever you want. You will be able to steal all the women you want. There will be no chief mightier than Maharon."

He was interested.

"Where," he asked, "will you get all those things?"

"From the other side of the Araguaya River." I knew that he knew nothing about that part of the world. "There are Indians over there who have salt and guns. They obtain them from the white men. I shall get them from those Indians, and return here to you. But I cannot go alone. They would shoot me, or capture me. Alone, I am too weak against those Indians. I must have my companions."

He grunted, and said nothing more. That day's interview was over.

The next day he was waiting for me. By now there was something formalized about our daily talk, about my campaign to wear him down. He didn't wait for me to make my usual request. As soon as I arrived, he said, "You may go with

two companions. One I shall keep here. Antonio stays with me."

I began to argue. He waved me away. I returned to my own house for another conference with my companions.

"He's playing with us," said Marcel bitterly. "Like a cat with a mouse."

Antonio said: "It's time we put an end to it. We ought to sneak out some night, and shoot the first Indian we see. Let's make a break."

"Excellent." Marcel was always ready for excitement. "Excellent. I'm for it."

I put a stop to that kind of talk. "Not a chance. Kill one of these people, and they will certainly kill us. These fellows can travel three miles through the jungle to our one. They can follow us the way they track a jaguar. We haven't a chance."

"Then what ——?"

"Then what? Then we'll bluff him. I've spoken up to Maharon before, and he's liked it. I'll speak up to him now. I'm going to tell him that the four of us are leaving, or nobody. Start packing. Get ready to go. Make no secret about it. Let the whole village see that we're leaving."

We began to pack, with Bwana looking on in consternation, and with half the village squatting around and talking excitedly. I returned to Maharon's house.

"We're getting ready," I told him. "We will leave at sunrise in the morning. Have your twenty men ready to go with us."

He grunted his assent.

"All of us are going," I said. "We need Antonio. We need every gun we can have. Those Indians over there are bad. We need strength against them, and all four of us are going."

He gave me a searching look, and then he grunted and walked away, leaving me suspended in mid-air about his intentions.

Things were coming to a showdown now. We prepared our rifles and the Roman candles. If the Chavantes made a move to hold Antonio, there would be nothing for it but to shoot. It was no pleasant prospect, but there it was, with no escaping it.

The following morning twenty Chavantes arrived to escort us. We left, and Antonio went with us, and nobody made the slightest objections.

To this day I have no idea of what was on Maharon's mind during all these months, and especially those final days. He was a fine old man—that I know. I am convinced that it was he who saved us at the time of our first encounter with the savages. Often, now, I find myself equally convinced that he never had the slightest illusions about any intentions, on our part, of returning to his village. I believe, even, that he never had any objections to our leaving. But he was chief, and as such he had to be a politician too. Like every statesman, he had to pretend to play the game of the people over whom he ruled, to think as they thought, to act as they wanted him to act. He had to *pretend*, and when he acted as his own considerable intelligence told him to act, it could only be under camouflage and with the help of a good deal of play-acting to keep up appearances.

I think back on my "execution" of Mahnweel, and I am convinced that Maharon, in spite of his peremptory orders, was never once in favor of it, and was vastly relieved by my trickery at the time. I think back on my long dickering about our escape, and I am convinced that he was only playing

with me, sparring for some kind of an opening that would permit him to let us go and still keep face with his people. I think so, but I don't know. It is difficult for a white man to get next to a primitive, to fathom what is on the other's mind. Was Maharon merely childish and gullible, or was he one of the most superb diplomats I have ever met?

The twenty Chavantes came for us at dawn, and we left with them. That was all there was to it, except for Bwana.

She made ready to go with us too, as she had gone everywhere else. I told her she couldn't, and she looked hurt and bewildered. I ordered her back into the house; I ordered her to stay in the village, and she burst into tears. But she stayed behind.

The twenty warriors who were to leave with us were fully armed with war clubs, bows, and spears. We rolled up our hammocks, picked up our packs, and started down the trail without a backward glance. The village was up, and at least a hundred men and women went along with us for the first few miles. Maharon was nowhere to be seen.

In command of our escort, and this may have been the old chief's final little joke, was the one man in the village with whom we had never got along. He was a surly, middle-aged sub-chief named Warrah, the worst-mannered man in the village, and he alone had always seemed to resent us. Again and again he had come to our house, insolently to loll in our hammocks; always he had felt insulted when we turned him out to lie down ourselves. Again and again he had simply grabbed our food and our salt, and had glowered at us when we snatched it back from him. Now it was he who plunged into the forest, to lead us away, to make sure that we didn't escape.

We were delayed over half an hour at the cornfield where we had first fallen into the Chavantes' hands. We had to bid an individual goodbye to each of the hundred who had accompanied us so far, rub noses with them, and say, "Tik-an-toe."

We plunged ahead, tense and troubled.

Behind us lay a life that seemed, in retrospect, almost idyllic. Suddenly we were very fond of those people, and suddenly we hated to leave them. Ahead lay certain trouble. Somehow we had to contrive to shake our escort when we reached the boat. If anybody were in charge but Warrah; I knew that he would have no hesitation about killing us.

There was an early full moon, and under the leadership of the bush-wise Chavantes we made far better time than we had on our trip up from the river. We pushed steadily on, and arrived at the Rio das Mortes near midnight.

We looked for the boat eagerly, afraid that some Indians might have found it, and either stolen or destroyed it. But it was safe. At once we dragged it into the water to swell the wood. It had been on land so long that it leaked considerably.

Warrah became suspicious as soon as he saw the boat.

"How can so many men go down in so small a boat?"

"Now don't you worry yourself. We'll get down all right. We'll built a raft and tow it behind. To come back we can get another boat on the Araguaya."

We slept little that night, and were up early to start recaulking the batalão. It turned out to be a big job that took most of the day. When the job was done, we started cutting trees for making a raft. Not that we wanted it, but all the Indians were around, and we had to find some way of gaining time. If we must, we decided, we'd start downstream



with the Chavantes on the raft, and then cut them loose in midstream.

"Warrah isn't as stupid as that," Marcel remarked. "He'll put some of his men in the batalão, and make some of us go on the raft."

"All right. You think of something better. We can take them down to the settlement if we have to. There we can get the other white men to help us shake them."

"Fine chance," said Pablo bitterly. "Those people down there will shoot as soon as they see us coming with this lot of savages."

"All right. You think of something better." I was a little sick of all this carping and questioning. There was nothing to be done but to go ahead as if in good faith, and to watch our chances after that. Sometime there *must* be an opportunity to escape.

"Come on there, Pablo. Get a move on. Get that log over here. We've got to finish this raft."

Warrah, officious and offensive as usual, tried to take entire charge. He ordered us to swing our hammocks inside the circle formed by the Chavantes' hammocks. Irritated, my nerves on edge, I told him to go to hell. Much to my delight and surprise, I saw the other Indians grinning maliciously, and tending to obey my orders rather than his. Evidently they didn't like him any better than I did.

We held a council, and I insisted that the next day should be spent in getting meat for the journey. Marcel, Antonio, and Pablo would go with the rifles after deer, while the Indians plunged into the deep brush after boar.

Warrah objected. He claimed that we could get plenty of meat downstream as we traveled. He was shrewd, and his claim was reasonable enough. But his unpopularity stood me

in good stead. All the other Indians agreed to my plan, delighted to see someone with authority opposing Warrah.

At dawn, everybody left camp except Warrah, his brother-in-law, and I. We sat around for an hour or so, mistrusting each other, but making no move. I had instructed Marcel and the others to wait at least an hour, to give the Indians plenty of time to get into the bush and out of earshot.

Then, suddenly, Marcel, Antonio, and Pablo appeared, without any deer. Warrah jumped up when he saw them emerging from the jungle, and set up a tremendous whooping at once, calling for the other Indians to return. Marcel grinned.

"What the hell's he yelling about?"

"Let him yell. They can't hear him. They're way in the bush, chasing pigs."

"Shall I hit him one?"

"No, wait. He's on his guard now. Get him quiet first."

Marcel said he wanted coffee. He said, in the Chavante language, that he'd seen deer on the other side of the river, and proposed to go after them as soon as he'd had a drink of coffee. Nonchalantly Pablo set about making a fire and putting the kettle on to boil, paying no attention whatever to Warrah and his brother-in-law.

The two Indians were bewildered and reassured by those actions. They stopped their hollering, and squatted down to watch Pablo with interest. Marcel and I each picked up a machete, and fiddled around, hacking poles for the raft. Gradually, however, we drifted over behind Warrah and his relative.

We stood there, looking into the fire, watching Pablo. Then Marcel gave me a wink. We took our machetes by the blade, and swung the heavy handles down on the sav-

ages' heads. Never have I hit a man with more satisfaction; never have I heard a more enchanting whack, or a more enchanting grunt than the one that Warrah let out as he crumpled to the ground.

At once we jumped to examine the two victims. They were only stunned, not seriously injured. The Chavantes had treated us well, we bore them no ill-will, and we didn't want to hurt any of them.

"Quick, tie them up."

We tied them, and we raced to load our boat, working frantically to get away before the other Indians returned. Warrah opened his eyes and looked at us blearily as we raced down the bank with our bundles, but he made no sound.

We jumped into the batalão, and shoved off, with fearful eyes on the forest. The Chavantes had no boat, but they would probably try to follow us along the bank.

But no Chavantes showed themselves. We rowed, paddled, pushed, poled, and steered for three days, almost without stopping, in a fever of excitement and almost without talking. Then we felt reasonably safe. We rested on the far bank for twenty-four hours, and then resumed our journey at a more leisurely pace.

We began to talk again, of what lay ahead. Of Brazil; was there another revolution? What was in store for us? I could return to the United States, and take my place among the eleven million unemployed. Marcel had a jail sentence to look forward to. Pablo? Antonio? Who knew?

Antonio said what was on all our minds:

"I'm sorry now that we did it. I wish we'd taken the Indians along, and taken our gold, bought what we needed, and returned to old Maharon."

"Too late, Antonio. Too late. We should at least have stayed until we had enough gold to last us a few years."

The green jungle slid past us on both sides of the dreaded, black River of the Dead.

For us it had been a River of Peace.

THE END



